

Frank Reade
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PART I
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FRANK READE LIBRARY

A central illustration shows a man in a dark military-style uniform with a bow tie and a peaked cap. He stands between two large, metallic mechanical arms that resemble the barrels of a massive gun or the legs of a giant robot. The arms have rivets and plates. In the background, there are stylized clouds and small figures of people in a chariot-like vehicle.

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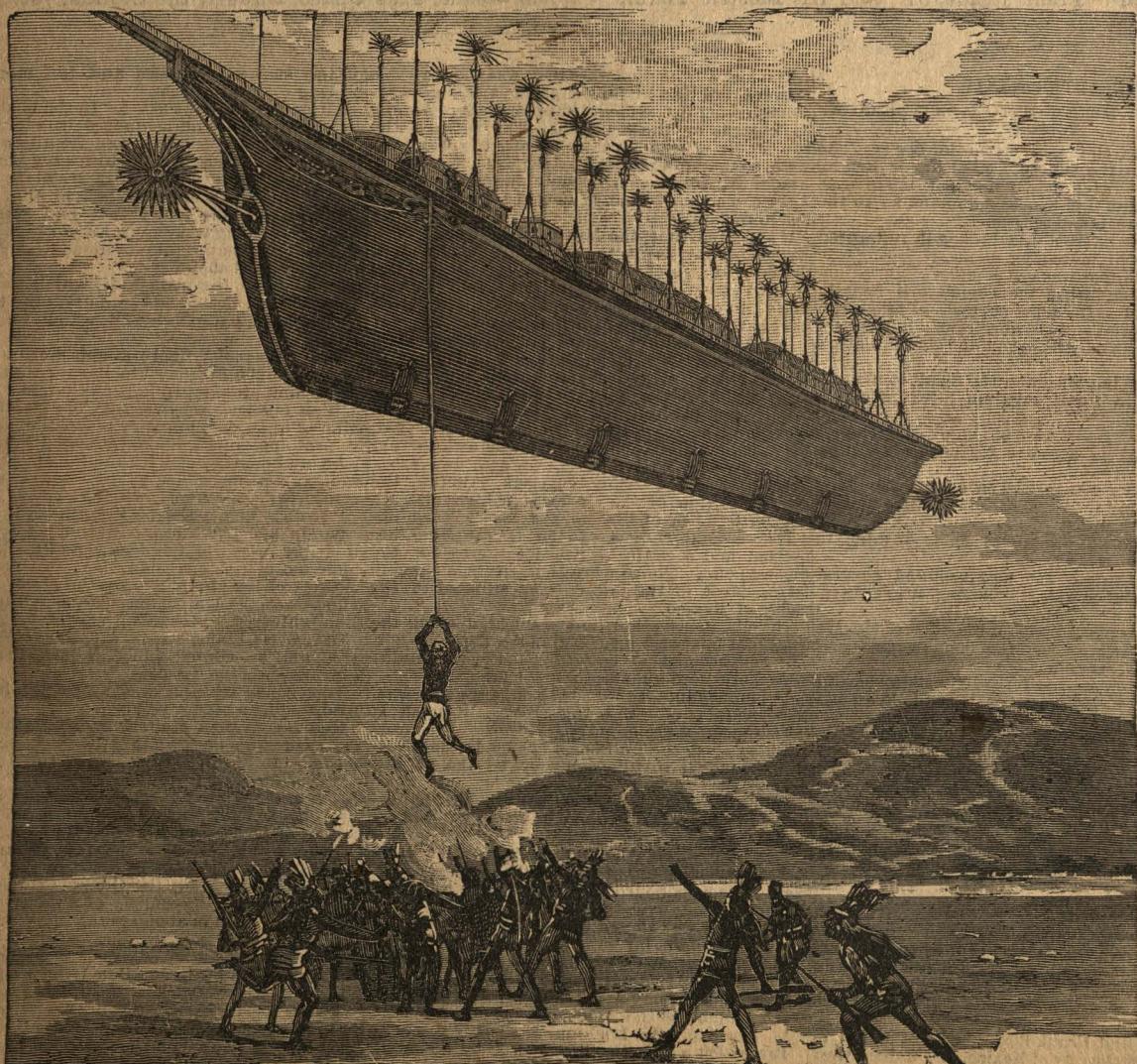
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FRANK READE, JR., And His Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

PART II.

By "NONAME."



The amazed and enraged savages leaped upward, making beyond their reach. The Indians yelled and skyward at the end of t

antic efforts to seize Pomp. But he was whisked, urged their weapons at Pomp as he was carried was attached to the air-ship.

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FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS.

A THRILLING STORY OF A WONDERFUL VOYAGE IN THE AIR.

PART II.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Electric Team," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Chase Through the Clouds," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CRUISING OVER MEXICO—MUTINY ON THE QUEEN CLIPPER.

"WHAT! does the electricity no longer come to the engine from the battery!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., scarcely crediting in that moment of surprise and consternation that Sands' statement as to the electrical current could be true.

"Yes, yes, the current has broken!" reiterated Sands, in tones of increasing alarm.

The Queen Clipper was still sinking.

During storms, when the clouds are heavily laden with electric fluid, the currents of telegraph lines are interfered with. So now, from a like cause, the electricity was decreased in the accumulators of the air-ship.

In the case of the telegraph the result is usually trivial; but with the air-ship the incident was a frightful peril.

The Queen Clipper was in imminent danger of being dashed to atoms upon the earth a thousand feet below.

The crew was panic-stricken as they realized the full magnitude of the dread calamity that so nearly menaced them.

But Frank did not lose his presence of mind in the face of the mighty peril.

The Queen Clipper had now dropped several hundred feet, but it was still among the electric clouds.

The lightning played around the ship of the air like erratic fireworks, and the danger increased each successive moment.

The suspensory screws were running slower and slower, and the swift descent threatened to become a rapid fall.

But Frank sprang down the companion-stairs, and darted into the battery-room.

There was an extra battery there not in use, which the inventor had reserved for occasions of special necessity like the present.

Instantly Frank connected the wires of this battery with the supply-drum, and under the accession of motive power, the air-ship, which was then less than one hundred feet from the earth, shot upward.

The electric clouds were left below. The full power of the battery-currents being no longer neutralized by the electric tension of the atmosphere, enabled the Queen Clipper's propellers to regain their normal speed, as did the suspensory helices, and the aerial vessel glided onward, leaving the storm behind it.

The Doctor and Frank Reade had not cared to remain long in the city of Mexico, and indeed they had scarcely made a landing there before they set sail again.

The fact was, at that date there was some trouble between the United States and Mexican governments, owing to the illegal imprisonment of American citizens by the Mexicans. War between the two countries was threatened, and the Mexicans were so bitter against all Americans that Frank Reade, Jr., received a friendly warning from the American counsel that it would be dangerous for him to remain.

It appeared that the Mexicans regarded Frank Reade as a spy, sent to spy out the condition of the Mexican country, and they declared that the air-ship was an invention of the hated "Americans" to enable them to gain information to be used in the seemingly impending conflict.

But if they did not remain in the city the sea of the air was free to the aeronet, and so the young inventor and the old scientist determined to inspect the interesting country from a safe elevation.

Only Barney objected to leaving the City of Mexico. "Sure, Master Frank," he had said, "it's spoilin' a chance for a foine bit av a ruction with the yellow nagurs yez are goin' aways."

Frank and his fellow voyagers saw that the greater portion of Mexico was a high plateau, fringed by a belt of low narrow coast. They observed several ranges of the Rocky Mountain system, and a chain of volcanoes crossing the highest point. There were short rivers, and small lakes. Most of the latter being situated in the valley of Mexico.

The climate was hot and pestilential along the coast, but mild and healthful in the high interior. The soil seemed to be fertile, and in the mountains there were gold and silver mines.

The inhabitants, the doctors said, were of mixed races, about one-tenth being creoles. Spanish is the language of the country.

Sailing along the gulf coast at a moderate elevation, the aerial voyagers discovered the natives fishing.

Frank thought it would be an excellent opportunity to supply the larder with fresh fish, and so he ordered a descent.

The Queen Clipper landed at a little fishing hamlet, and having hired several of the men of the village to come on board to assist in the work, the air-ship put out over the water.

A drag net was rigged and an hour's work sufficed to fill up the larders.

Then the natives were landed and the Queen Clipper resumed her air voyage.

That night Barney stood at the wheel. The hour was midnight, as the little clock in the steersman's glass house told the Irishman.

Barney felt a little timid. He had by no means forgotten the "ghost" of Hall. The silence was unbroken save by the monotonous "whirr! whirr!"

of the suspensory helices and the more labored beating of the propellers.

All at once Barney started. He fancied he heard a stealthy footstep at the door of the glass house. It was a moment before the Irishman, with the fear of the "ghost" upon him now very strong, could muster up sufficient courage to turn and look at the door, which was behind him.

But he heard the sound that had startled him again, and trying to keep up his courage by telling himself that Pomp was up to some trick to frighten him, he turned about.

As he did so, the glass door, which was opaque, slowly swung open, and there upon the threshold, Barney beheld the "ghost" which he had seen before.

The white-robed figure stood motionless for a moment, while it seemed to Barney that the terrible blazing eyes emitted infernal flames.

Then one long arm was slowly extended, and it pointed at Barney, precisely as on the occasion of its first appearance, it had indicated Pomp.

An awful groan came from the shrouded form, and poor Barney fell upon his knees shaking as though with an ague fit, while he yelled:

"Help! Help! Begob I'm kill be the ghost!"

Sands and Blake heard Barney's terrified yell, and they rushed to the deck. Smith Brown also came out of the stern cabin.

All three were in time to see the ghost, as it vanished down the companion-way, as it had done on the night when it was seen first.

Of course Frank Reade, Jr., was called to the deck, and acquainted with the fact of the second appearance of the "ghost."

The young inventor was more perplexed and mystified than ever.

Hearing the men muttering among themselves, and expressing the wish that they were safely clear of the haunted ship, Frank said to the doctor:

"That ghost trick will make trouble for me with the crew if the fraud is not exposed. If ever I see the 'ghost,' I'll capture it at the muzzle of my revolver, or send a bullet through it."

Frank's patience was completely exhausted, and he meant to do precisely as he said.

The succeeding day the Queen Clipper made a landing to secure a supply of wild fruits, which were to be found in abundance.

Meantime, Smith Brown had been at work covetously inciting the terrified crew to desert the airship, and Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs had seconded the insane professor in his efforts.

Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor were standing in the bow of the vessel when all the crew, except Barney and Pomp, came marching across the deck headed by Chief Engineer Sands.

The men had resolved to take the present op-

PART I

"I— to desert the Queen Clipper while it was—
—rth."

"Preer Sands had been chosen the spokesman
of the party."

"Ting before Frank Reade, Jr., Sands saluted
superior officer respectfully, and then he said :
Frank Reade, we want to do what's right, but
we can't risk our lives on this doomed air-ship any
longer. Hall's ghost haunts it. The spirit will
make good Hall's threat to destroy the vessel. It
has appeared twice. When it comes the third time
we believe the vessel will be destroyed. So we
notify you that we are now about to leave the
Queen Clipper for good."

"What! Will you desert me thus far away in
Mexico? You forget your agreement. By the
terms of your shipping papers you agreed to make
as long a voyage as I desired!" cried Frank.

"We won't stay another moment on this doomed
ship, papers or no papers. Come on, mess-
mates!" retorted Sands, firmly, and he started for
the landing-ladder.

"Hold!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr., firmly, as
he sprang before the chief engineer. "This is
mutiny!"

"Mutiny or not, we leave the ship now! Let
me pass!" replied Sands.

"Halt where you are! I command this vessel
yet, and I'll shoot down the first one of you mu-
tineers who attempts to leave the deck!" thundered
Frank, as he leveled a revolver at Sands and
his followers.

At the same moment Dr. Vaneyke entered the
central cabin.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MUTINEERS BROUGHT TO TERMS—IN THE
TEMPLE OF THE INCAS.

SANDS halted, and his followers hesitated. Evi-
dently they were not prepared for such a deter-
mined stand as Frank Reade, Jr., was making.

Just then, when a conflict seemed to be threat-
ened if the mutineers persisted, the Queen Clipper
suddenly left the earth and soared upward.

Dr. Vaneyke had turned on the electricity to the
central engine. Sands uttered an enraged cry
and darted toward the central cabin.

"I'll bring the ship to a landing again in short
order!" he hissed.

But at the door of the central cabin Dr. Vaneyke
confronted the irate engineer with a leveled rev-
olver.

"You can't enter here until Frank gives orders
to admit you," said the doctor sternly.

Sands recoiled before the old scientist's menac-
ing weapon, and Pomp and Barney, understanding
how they could best serve Frank in this crisis, at-
tained charge of the propelling engines.

The mutineers were baffled, at least for the time;
for until the air-ship again made a landing they
were to all intents prisoners on board it.

Of course the disaffected crew understood this,
and the cunning crazy professor, intent upon cur-
rying favor with Frank, said :

"Mr. Reade is right after all, lads. We have no
authority to leave him as we proposed. I see it
now."

"I'll make you a proposition, men, and if you
agree to it we shall get on as pleasantly as hereto-
fore. I propose that you give me four days in
which to prove to you that you are the victims of
a trick, and that the supposed ghost is merely a de-
ception. If at the end of the time specified the
ghost is not laid to your complete satisfaction, you
shall be free to leave the vessel."

"All right—that's fair enough. I for one agree!"
said Sands.

The others assented.

Then Frank put up his pistol, the doctor admitted
Sands to his engine room, and the mutiny was
at an end.

Smith Brown retired to his post in the stern
cabin, and finding himself alone he vented his
rage and disappointment over the failure of the
mutiny in fierce threats and savage imprecations.
Then he muttered :

"But I'll succeed yet. Frank Reade, Jr., shall
not find out the secret of the ghost in four days.
The crew, save the Irishman and the nigger, shall
yet desert the air-ship, and I shall seize it. Noth-
ing shall prevent my becoming the king of the air!"

Meantime Beam and Driggs had enough of the
voyage on the air-ship, and of Smith Brown's risky
plots and schemes to seize it.

Those enterprising gentlemen felt that the
were losing valuable time from the employment of
their profession, and they longed to be again en-
gaged in "holding up" stage-coaches and robbing
passengers.

The Queen Clipper was too limited a sphere for
their exuberant genius and Beam said to his com-
rade :

"I propose we take the first chance we get to
steal Frank Reade, Jr.'s, gold again, and run away
with it, when we can make sure Smith Brown modiate all."

won't stop us. He'll never capture the Queen
Clipper. You may be sure of that."

"Right you are, pard, I'm thinkin'. We'll cut
an' run with Frank Reade's gold, just as you say,"
assented Driggs.

The following day Frank and the doctor became
engaged in an animated discussion of the merits
and demerits of the remarkable Panama Canal
scheme.

This conversation led to their making up their
minds to visit Central America.

They were aware that the country, save for a
short distance along the seaboard, was almost un-
known save to a few adventurous travelers who
had penetrated to the interior, and brought back
news of a strange people, supposed to belong to
the ancient Inca tribe.

They had heard of the wonderful temples buried
in the forests of Yucatan, and the strange stories of
the terrible rites and ceremonies of the people of
the jungle had interested them.

They had in the air-ship just the means to enable
them to obtain a bird's-eye view of all the
wonders of which they had heard, and looking for-
ward to an interesting and adventurous journey,
Frank ordered the air-ship to be headed for Cen-
tral America.

The Queen Clipper sailed steadily southward.

The winds were favorable to the course of the
aeronet, and as a high rate of speed was main-
tained it did not require much time to make the
run from over Mexico to the borders of the Isth-
mus of Panama.

Having made the desired inspection there the
Queen Clipper was guided northeast over Yuca-
tan.

The forest and jungles were almost impenetrable
for some distance from the seaboard. But further
on the interior became more open, and there was
some delightful country abounding in beautiful
valleys, uplands and meadows. Villages of the
natives were seen.

The voyagers were surprised to see houses con-
structed of hewn stone in magnificent designs, and
here and there they discovered massive ancient
temples. Some were in ruins while others were in-
tact, as when they were built by the race of the
once mighty Incas.

The people were dark and evidently warlike.

One day a descent was made in an open space in
a jungle where the Queen Clipper was entirely con-
cealed by the surrounding vegetation.

Frank Reade, Jr., had discovered a large village
near by, and in the adjacent woods, not far from
where the Queen Clipper made a landing, he saw a
grand stone temple.

The young inventor's motive in making a de-
scent, was not one merely of curiosity or for ad-
venture. He had seen that there was a great com-
motion in the native village, and that a long line of
fierce-looking men in flowing, white garments,
were marching from the village in the direction of
the temple.

In their midst was a beautiful white girl, evi-
dently a captive. But though her hands were
bound, her brow was laden with a wreath of flowers,
and she was robed in snowy white.

Following the men in flowing white robes, came
the populace, many dusky warriors, armed with
bows and arrows, and ugly-looking spears, and
behind them a motley crowd of men, women and
children.

Doctor Vaneyke, who had been a student of the
works of Yucatan travelers, said that the men in
white were the high priests of the Incas, and that
he believed they were conducting the beautiful
white girl to the temple in the woods to offer her
as a sacrifice to their "god of fire."

"You know," the doctor had added, "the ancien-
t Incas believed in human sacrifices."

That was enough for Frank Reade, Jr.

He resolved to save the beautiful white girl, and
so the descent of the Queen Clipper was made as
stated.

As soon as the aerial vessel rested on the earth
Frank mustered all the crew and gave out mail
shirts to them. All armed themselves, and leaving
the doctor in charge of the vessel, which he was
convinced the natives had not discovered, Frank
placed himself at the head of his little band and
set out through the woods for the temple, which
he hoped to reach before the priests arrived with
their captive.

Barney was happy.

"Sure an' I feel like a Donnybrook boy wance
more. Faith, an' it's a foine bit av a ruction wid
the nagurs I'm after countin' on," said he, as the
party advanced.

But the priests, and their fair captive reached the
temple in advance of Frank Reade, Jr., and his men.

From the edge of the adjacent timber, while they
were themselves undiscovered, Frank and his fol-
lowers saw the priest enter the temple, with the
fair captive. The multitude followed. The spa-
cious temple seemed sufficiently large to accom-

modate all.

The succeeding moment a girlish voice from
within the temple was heard to utter a terrible

scream of despair.

"Come, men. We must take desperate chances
and charge right into the temple, if we would save
the girl! We must rely on the advantage of our
fire-arms, and the surprise we shall give the natives
to bring us out of the battle!" said Frank.

The succeeding moment the men of the air-ship
charged from the cover.

Across the open space they went at full speed,
and then with a rousing cheer they dashed into
the sacred temple of the Incas, where no white
man had ever before set foot.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A GREAT BATTLE—DOCTOR VANEYKE TO THE RESCUE.

LEADING from the door of the great temple
there was a wide aisle, separated from the rest of
the spacious hall by wooden partitions ten feet
high on either side.

The partitions did not extend quite to the door,
a space being left by which entrance could be
made to the two divisions of the temple, into
which the center aisle divided it.

These great side divisions were crowded with
natives, but there was no one in the central aisle.
That was the sacred pathway to a great altar at the
further end of the temple, and no one save the
priests and the victim intended for the sacrifice
ever traversed it.

The altar, which was of stone, extended com-
pletely across the temple, from one wall to the
other. It was about six feet high, and a set of six
steps led up to it at the end of the central aisle.

As Frank Reade, Jr., and his followers entered
the temple they saw a great fire blazing upon the
center of the altar, and the white-robed priests,
twelve in number, were preparing to place the cap-
tive girl in the flames.

Not a moment was to be lost by the rescue party.
They charged straight up the sacred pathway to
the altar.

Reaching the stone steps Frank and his men
bounded up them, and gained the altar, the top
of which was flat, and about ten feet wide.

The astonished priests fled before the onset of
the rescue party, and Frank Reade, Jr., threw his
arm about the half fainting form of the girl captive,
and tore her from the grasp of one of the priests
who had started to drag her away.

Barney and Pomp whacked the fleeing priests
over the shoulders as they ran, and in a moment
the altar was in possession of Frank Reade, Jr.,
and his party.

The priests had leaped down among the popu-
lace, and urged on by them, the dusky warriors
surged into the sacred aisle, and in a trice, before
the rescue party could beat a retreat, the way out
of the temple was blocked by the fierce natives.

The warriors drew their bows, and seeing that a
shower of arrows were about to be discharged at
him and his comrades, Frank leaped down be-
hind the altar with the white girl in his arms.
The others followed their leader.

Their movement was accomplished none too
soon. Immediately a volley of arrows flew over
their heads, and fell behind them, shattered against
the stone wall of the temple.

On the side of the altar now occupied by the
crew of the Queen Clipper, a flight of steps, ex-
tending the entire length of the structure, led down
to the floor where fuel for the great altar-fire was
stored.

There was, however, no rear exit from the tem-
ple, and it appeared, therefore, that the devoted
band of heroes must perish where they were, or
fight their way out, through the army of savage
natives that thronged every foot of space within
the structure.

Kneeling on the rear stairs of the altar, and level-
ing their rifles over the top of the same, the men
of the air-ship discharged a volley of bullets at the
natives as the latter charged forward.

The crash of musketry in that confined place
was deafening, and with the terrific detonation came
the yells and groans of the natives.

The pandemonium at once became frightful. The
natives fell back before the deadly fire from the
Americans' rifles.

But they retired only to charge again, urged to
slay the strangers by the white-robed priests, who
did not mean to be robbed of the beautiful victim
they had doomed for the sacrifice.

The battle raged fast and furious. The natives
were fully resolved that the white men should
never escape from the sacred temple alive.

Frank Reade, Jr., had engaged in some desperate
combats in his time, but never had he known any-
thing like this. Fanatical zeal to avenge the des-
ecration of their sacred temple, urged the natives to
desperate deeds.

Over the bodies of the dead they charged again
and again, only to be met by storms of bullets, for

FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS.

The defenders of the altar had spread out all along

Not a native had succeeded in reaching the top of the altar when the combat had been waged for some moments.

But Frank Reade, Jr., knew this state of affairs could not be prolonged indefinitely. At the rapid rate at which his men were firing, the supply of ammunition which they had brought with them would soon be exhausted, and once they could not shoot, the enemy would soon overpower them by sheer force of numbers.

The fight was continued. At last all the ammunition for the rifles was exhausted. But every

man, and an electric whistle made the air echo with the most unearthly shrieks.

The natives no longer thought of the invaders of the temple. They seemed only intent upon saving themselves, and through the door they fled, pell-mell. The temple was very quickly emptied.

Frank, with the rescued girl in his arms, darted out of the temple behind the fleeing natives, and his men closely followed him. There, at an elevation of some fifty feet only, hung the Queen Clipper, suspended in the air. Dr. Vaneyke had, single-handed, brought the aerial vessel to the rescue just in time. Hearing the continued firing in the temple, he fancied Frank and his party needed him.

Beam dropped the casket and rushed followed by Driggs, when he saw Frank Jr. had discovered him.

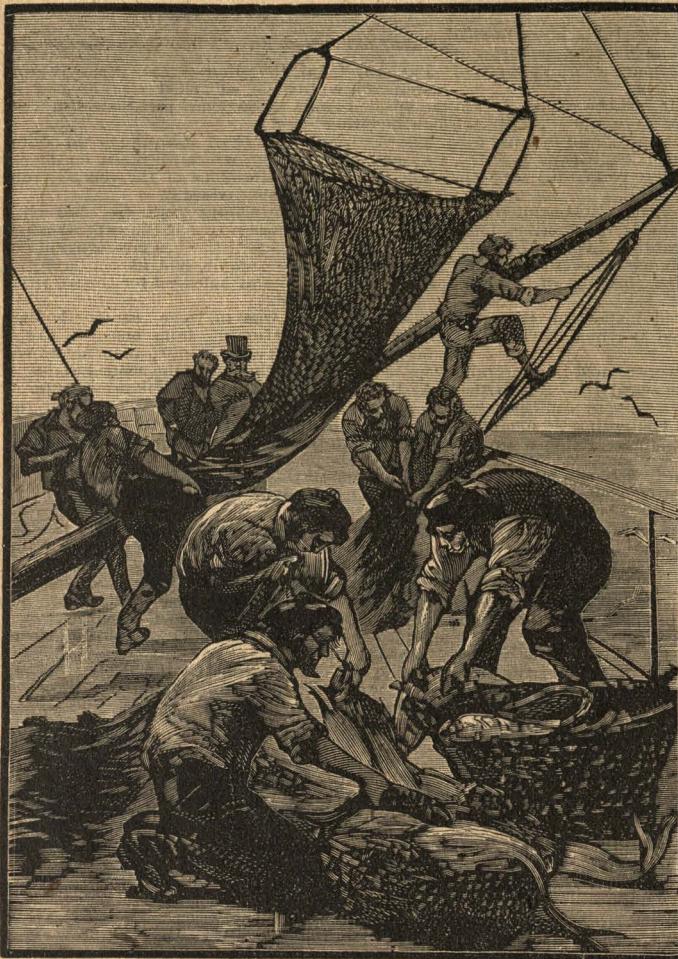
"You thieving rascals!" shouted the young venturer, and he followed them on deck.

Beam and Driggs seemed quite overjoyed with consternation at their detection.

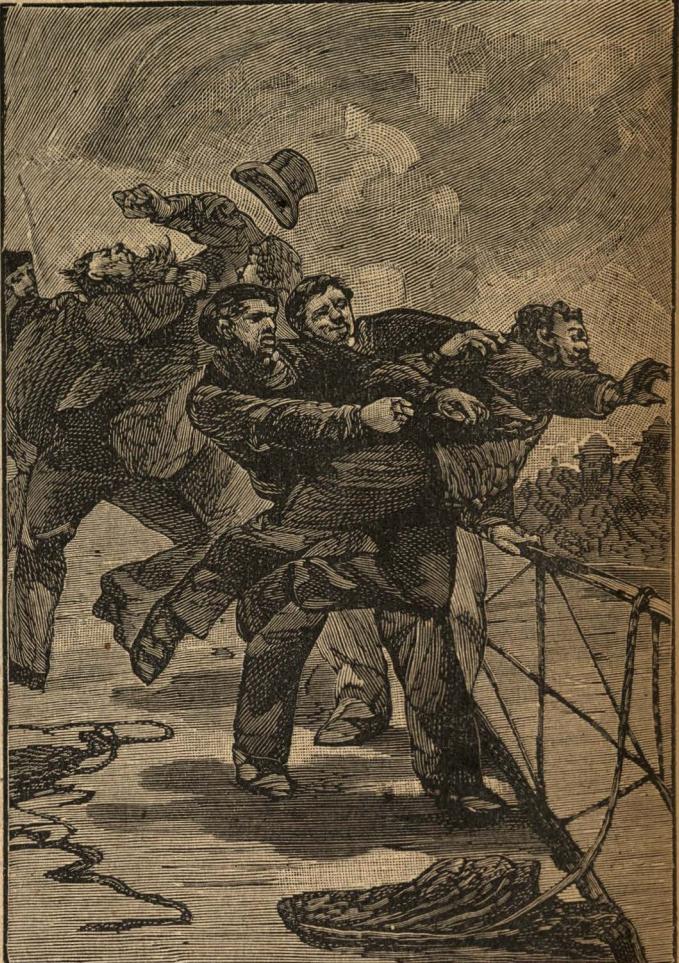
It chanced that all the other members of the crew were on deck.

"Those rascals are thieves. I just caught them after they had robbed my cabin!" shouted Frank, pointing at the culprits.

"Throw the blackguards overboard, bad luck till them!" shouted Barney.



Having hired several of the men of the village to come on board to assist in the work, the air-ship put out over the water. A drag-net was rigged and an hour's work sufficed to fill up the larders.



"Throw the blackguards overboard, bad luck till them!" shouted Barney. The next moment Beam and Driggs were seized by the other members of the crew and hustled to the rail, despite their desperate resistance.

member of the heroic little band carried a revolver.

With these weapons it was possible to hold out a little longer, and the Americans began to discharge their revolvers, while every one of them now believed that the hour of their doom had come.

The powder smoke hung thick and heavy in the temple-hall, and through the shadowy canopy the hideous faces of the charging natives looked like the visages of a legion of fiends.

"Let us die like men and Americans, with our faces to the foe!" at last shouted Frank Reade, Jr., desperately, for he knew then that almost the last shot from the revolvers had been fired.

But, at that awful crisis, when all seemed lost, what sound was that that burst upon the hearing of all within the sacred Inca temple?

Frank Reade, Jr., uttered a shout as he heard the startling sound, for surely it was the report of the cannon on board the Queen Clipper.

"Courage, boys! Courage!" shouted the young inventor, and as he spoke "Boom!" came the report of the cannon, and a shell struck the door of the temple with terrific force.

The natives were terror-stricken then.

"Boom!" once more thundered the cannon, and the temple door was riven from its hinges and fell shattered by the exploding bomb.

Then the bell on the Queen Clipper clanged loud-

help. As he understood the machinery he had readily navigated the Queen Clipper the short distance to the temple, and promptly opened fire with the cannon as we have seen.

Frank and his party were soon safe on board the air-ship again with the young girl they had saved.

She was questioned as the air-ship sailed away, and she said she was the daughter of an American resident of Aspinwall, and that she had been

wrecked upon the coast of Yucatan and captured

by the natives. She believed all the other persons

who had escaped from the wrecked vessel had been put to death by the natives.

Frank Reade, Jr., at once sailed for Aspinwall,

and there he landed the young girl, who was received by her relatives with great rejoicing, for they supposed she was lost at sea.

Some hours later, as the Queen Clipper was sailing northward, and Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke were taking dinner in the dining-saloon, Zeke Beam and Driggs crept to the young inventor's cabin, and entering it, they removed the casket of gold from its hiding-place.

Beam carried the casket, and he started for his quarters, followed by Driggs. Just then Frank Reade, Jr., discovered them. He was going to his cabin to bring a certain book which he required to prove he was right in an argument he and the doctor were having.

The next moment Beam and Driggs were seized by the other members of the crew and hustled to the rail, despite their desperate resistance.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THRILLING INCIDENTS—BARNEY AND POMP IN PERIL.

PERHAPS the other members of the crew of the Queen Clipper only meant to frighten the two rascals whom Frank had caught stealing his gold.

At all events as the young inventor promptly stoated to them to let Beam and Driggs alone the men released the two trembling wretches.

"Be gob!" cried Barney, "will ye be ather doubtin' av me words now, Masther Frank, whin I be's tellin' av ye that it was thin two blackguards that knocked me on the head in the central cabin beyant whin the ship was dropped down among the red nagurs on the plains?"

"Indeed, Barney, in the light of the present discovery of the villainy of these men I am inclined to think you are correct," replied Frank.

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, "if the manifestations in proof of the presence of a secret enemy on board the air-ship had not been made previously to the advent of Beam and Driggs among us we might conclude that they were the authors of all

As pursued and pursuers drew nearer, the men on board the aeronef heard the Mexicans yell:

"Death to the Americanos! Death to the Americanos!"

Reaching the Queen Clipper a safe distance ahead of the vindictive Mexicans, Beam and Driggs bounded up the landing-ladder, which was still down, and rushing to Frank, they fell upon their knees at his feet in abject terror.

"For God's sake, let us remain on the air-ship, and we will be your slaves! We are truly penitent. In mercy save us from those murderous Mexicans!" cried Beam.

"Yes—yes. The greasers mean to kill us. They

Half a dozen swarthy executioners had seized hold of the free end of the rope, and they were waiting for the word from the alcalde, who acted as master of the proceedings, to swing their victim up.

"By Heavens they shall not execute my country-man thus! He looks like a noble fellow and probably he is guilty of no wrong!" exclaimed Frank, excitedly.

Then he gave the needed orders, and the vessel descended two hundred feet. The Mexicans set up a terrible yell as they saw the air-ship, and the alcalde gave the word to launch the young American into eternity.

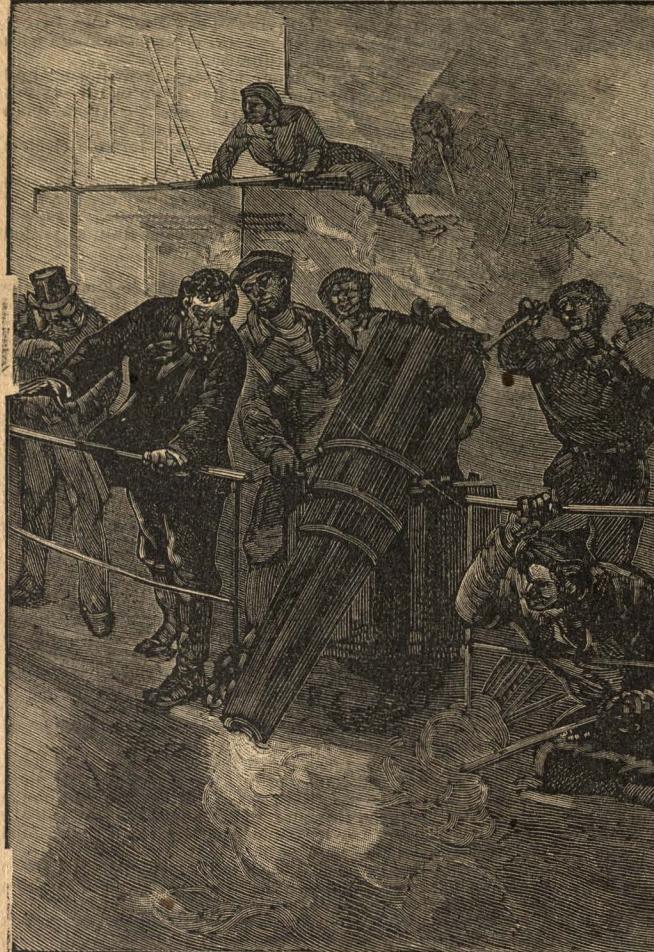
rascal of ferocious appearance, reached out to grasp him as he sprang up the ladder.

The burly Mexican started up the ladder, Barney, standing at the head of it after the young American had gained the deck, made no attempt to stop him.

On the contrary Barney turned as if to run away and the Mexican gave an exultant yell and shouted to his comrades to follow him and board the strange air vessel of the cowardly Americanos.

But Barney was working a stratagem for the benefit of that ugly rascal. The Irishman had picked up his shillalah.

Pomp, who stood near, grinned from ear to ear



Barney and the young inventor had trained the cannon on the Mexican executioners, as the vessel descended, and at a signal from his master Barney discharged the cannon, which was loaded with grape-shot.

have a young American now a captive in the town. We saw him, and the Mexicans were making preparations to hang him when they discovered us, and started to capture us, too," added Driggs.

"Rascals though you are, I cannot leave you to fall into the clutches of those murderous wretches, for you saved my life, and I owe it to you to save you now," replied Frank.

Then, while Beam and Driggs fervently and sincerely thanked the young inventor for his mercy, he ordered the aeronef to be elevated.

Immediately the wonderful suspensory machinery began to work, and the noble ship of the air soared into space, while the disappointed Mexicans stood stock still and watched it in complete amazement.

The air vessel quickly attained an elevation of about three hundred feet.

Then the commander gave the assistant engineers the necessary signals, and the aeronef sailed on over the Mexican town.

A mob of excited Mexicans was assembled in an open square in the center of the village, and they were in the act of hanging a handsome young American. There was one large tree in the center of the square. A rope had been thrown over one of its projecting limbs, and the other end of the rope was noosed about the neck of the young American.

But Barney and the young inventor had trained the cannon on the Mexican executioners, as the vessel descended, and at a signal from his master Barney discharged the cannon, which was loaded with grape-shot.

CHAPTER XXXIX. ANOTHER RESCUE—THE BATTLE OF THE PIE—A DESPERATE MAN.

THE result of the discharge from the cannon was quite satisfactory to Frank and his men. The murderous Mexicans who were about to swing up the young American were scattered by the shot, and the succeeding instant the young man threw the rope from about his neck and rushed toward the rescuers.

But his enemies did not mean that he should escape thus easily, and the alcalde rallied them, and led them to charge upon the fugitive.

As they rushed forward, intent upon again securing him, the air-ship swept earthward rapidly. The escaping man strained every muscle in the race that ensued. But he gained the Queen Clipper just as the aeronef reached the earth.

Barney stood ready, and instantly threw over the landing-ladder, and the fugitive ran up it. But the pursuing Mexicans were close upon him. Indeed, the foremost of his foes, a huge, swarthy

in anticipation of what was coming, as he said to Blake, who was near him:

"Gollie, you is a gwine ter hear suffin' drap putty soon. Dat Irisher done lay fo' dat greaser, an' I spec's he'll lay out de yeller nigger."

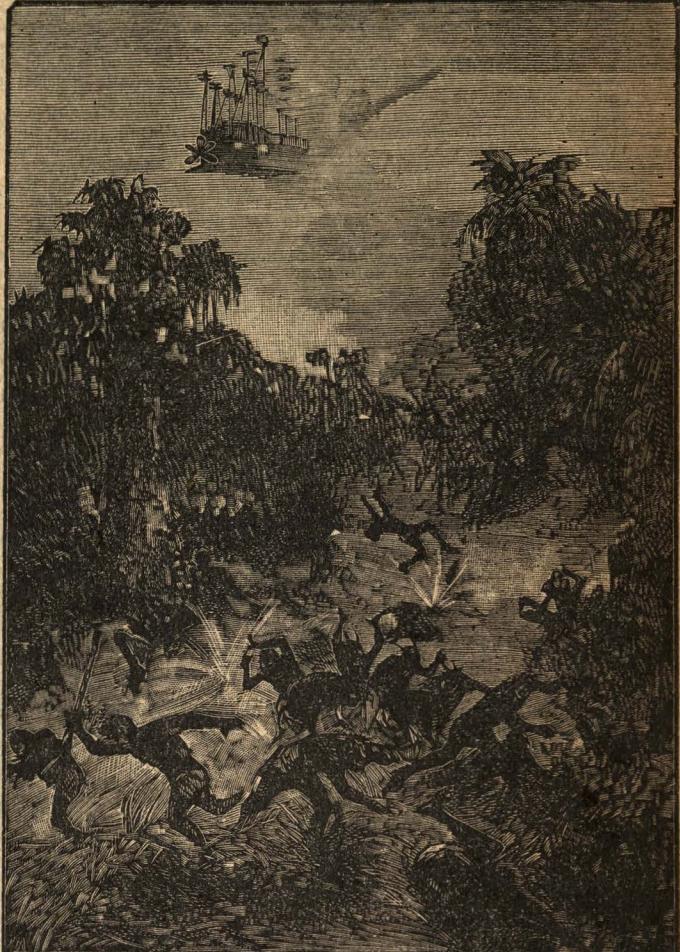
The next moment the head of the Mexican appeared above the rail as he recklessly ascended the landing ladder.

Then Barney turned like a flash, and "whack" came his shillalah down upon the skull of the Mexican. The fellow threw up his hands and fell backward among his followers, precipitating several of them who had ventured upon the ladder to the ground.

"Whoop! Come up and see me! Begob, I'm the reception committee av one only, but it's such a warm welcome I'll give yez that ye will be afther thankin' the lucky stars there's not two av me!" cried Barney.

Then the air vessel began to ascend, and, although the irate Mexicans fired several shots at it, no one on board was hit, and it was soon beyond the range of the enemy's rifles.

The young American who had so narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Mexicans stated to Frank that his name was Kenneth Lake, and that he had crossed the Rio Grande in search of a beautiful young American girl, whom he loved with all



"heart, and with whom he had secretly plighted his troth."

From the young man's narrative it appeared that he and his sweetheart lived on adjoining ranches in Texas, and that the young girl's step-father was opposed to their union.

The step-father was a mercenary old rascal, and he had sold Mollie Marion, Kenneth Lake's beloved, to a wealthy Mexican cattle king called Don Alverado.

Don Alverado had secretly carried off the maiden to his great ranch in northern Mexico. Kenneth was in search of his sweetheart, whom he meant to rescue, when he was captured by a band of men from the village from which he had escaped.

The Mexicans of that hamlet were bitter against all Americans because two of their number had recently been slain in an encounter with Texan rangers, who had raided across the Rio Grande in search of stolen cattle.

Kenneth Lake further said that Don Alverado was in league with the Indians, and that he always kept a strong band of redskin cattle-thieves at his ranch, who from time to time, as opportunity offered, crossed the river to steal American stock.

Frank became interested in Kenneth Lake's romantic history, and before the young man had concluded his story, the inventor had volunteered to help him.

Kenneth knew the location of Don Alverado's ranch so well that he was sure he could pilot the air-ship to it. So he stationed himself beside the helmsman, and gave the course for the vessel.

Meantime Barney had retired to the bow cabin, and having closed the door, he began to shake with laughter.

"Bedad, an' I was affer foolin' the nagur nately indade. Faith, an' he got a pair av black eyes in the head av him, for tryin' to git satisfaction for the stolen pole from the wrong gossoon! Be the Harp av Tara, but the nagur would be mad if he was affer foindin' out that it was mesel as stole the pole. Now, begob, I'll be affer having a bit av a feast av the same," said Barney to himself.

Then he opened a locker and took out a large and very tempting looking pie.

Seating himself, the tricky, fun-loving Irishman began to devour that pie with such evident relish that no higher testimonial of its excellence could have been desired even by the defrauded baker.

"Faith, an' I'm affer givin' the nagur credit for buildin' av a good poie. But sure, an' it's Mrs. Barney O'Shea herself that kin bate the nagur any day on pole," mused Barney.

And he did not observe that the door had blown ajar, nor did he see the wrathful face of Pomp peering in at him.

The darky had recognized the stolen pie, and that discovery made him a mighty mad colored individual. But when he heard Barney depreciate his skill as a baker, he was simply wild.

"Dat ar am addin' of insult to injury! I'se a-gwine ter git square wid dat Irisher to dat," muttered Pomp, under his breath.

But just at that moment a gust of wind almost lifted him off his feet and hurled him through the door against Barney.

The next moment the two had clinched and struggled out on the deck.

"I'se got you down fine now, Irish, an' I'se a-gwine to knock satisfaction out ob yer!" roared Pomp.

"Yes, an' I've gct the pole down, an' bedad yez can't be affer knockin' that out av me!" retorted Barney.

In their struggle they had reached the companion stairs.

Neither thought of their danger, and the next moment they went rolling to the bottom of the flight.

Both were pretty well over their desire for further hostilities when they picked themselves up and rubbed their bruises.

Frank immediately called them on deck, and having given them both a lecture and forbidden the "continuance of the battle of the pie," he dismissed them.

But in his heart Pomp was resolved to "git square on dat Irisher yit."

Sometime later Kenneth Lake announced that Don Alverado's ranch was in sight. The speed of the Queen Clipper was at once increased.

Running before the wind she bore down on the stronghold of the Mexican cattle king. It was in the midst of a grazing country, well adapted for a cattle ranch. There were clumps of timber to shade the stock at noonday, and streams of water in which they could slake their thirst.

All at once, as the aeronef was over a belt of timber, the voice of Kenneth Lake rang out excitedly, and he shouted:

"There is Don Alverado and my lost love now!

See, they are traversing the wood, accompanied by a strong escort of Indians!"

Glancing downward Frank saw that what Kenneth said was true. The Mexican Don and a beautiful young girl were on foot, following a trail through the timber.

Their Indian escort preceded them.

"I'll soon disperse the Indians and then we'll swoop down on the old Mexican," said Frank.

The cannon was immediately brought to bear on the Indians. The day was dark and cloudy. In the woods the shadows fell densely, but Frank could see to accurately aim the big gun, and very soon he began to discharge explosive shells.

The terrified Indians thinking thunderbolts from the sky were descending upon them, fled in dismay.

The old Mexican vainly sought to call back his red-skins.

Then seeing the air-ship sailing downward toward him and recognizing Kenneth Lake on board it, a terrible expression came upon the old villain's face, and drawing a revolver he thrust its muzzle against the head of the trembling girl whom he held firmly and shouted:

"If the Americanos come nearer with their accursed flying machine, I'll blow out the maiden's brains!"

"For God's sake stop the vessel!" cried Kenneth Lake in terror.

CHAPTER XL.

A NOVEL PLAN OF RESCUE—KENNETH LAKE VOLUNTEERS.

THE desperate Mexican seemed in his jealous rage to be entirely capable of making good his threat to shoot Mollie Marion dead on the spot, if the Queen Clipper approached any nearer to him.

Frank shared Kenneth Lake's conviction that Don Alverado was in deadly earnest.

At once then he shouted to Chief Engineer Sands to turn on more motive power to the central engine. Then he ordered the propellers reversed.

Of course the result was, when these orders were obeyed, the aeronef ascended swiftly.

And Frank hastily wrote the following note on the leaf of a blank book with a pencil, and wrapping it about a weight hurled it down to the Mexican:

"You are notified that in case you harm the young girl now in your power I will make war on you and your band to the bitter end." FRANK READE, JR.

"Commander of the Queen Clipper."

The old Mexican was seen to pick up the note and Frank hoped he could read it.

After scanning the note, the Mexican led the beautiful American girl away through the woods. Frank watched them through a powerful glass, and he saw them pass out of the woods and go toward Don Alverado's ranch-house.

This was a substantial adobe structure, square in shape, and evidently built to serve as a fortress in case of need.

Near this main building were a number of cabins which were the quarters of the don's peons, and beyond these were a score of Indian tepees, the homes of the red-skin cattle thieves of the Mexican band.

To attack and capture this ranch would require a small army on foot. But Frank was inclined to think that he could successfully bombard the place from the Queen Clipper.

But he was in a dilemma.

If he attacked the Mexican ranch he would cause the murder of Mollie Marion, he feared.

"What is to be done? We cannot openly attack the ranch now, for I know Don Alverado's vindictive character well enough to feel assured that he will not hesitate to slay Mollie if we do so," said Kenneth Lake.

"We must resort to a ruse," replied Frank.

"True. But what ruse can succeed now?"

"That's the all-important question. Let me think for a moment."

Kenneth did not speak again for several moments. Frank seemed to meditate deeply.

Finally he said:

"Is there a moon to-night?"

"No," replied Kenneth.

"Then a desperate attempt shall be made to accomplish the rescue of the maiden secretly, under cover of the darkness."

"Explain the plan you have in mind, for I am sure, from the expression of your countenance, that you have thought of one."

"Yes," asserted Frank, handing Kenneth his glass he continued:

"Look well at the ranch-house into which the old Mexican has led your stolen sweetheart. You will observe that the roof is flat. There is a door in the roof as you can plainly see. Very well, now to-night the Don will be on the lookout for us, that is certain, and of course, he will surround the house with numerous guards, so it will be

well nigh impossible for any of us to steal by them undetected."

"Certainly. It is only reasonable to surmise that," assented Kenneth.

"Well, then. This is my plan: I mean that some one shall be let down from the air vessel by means of a rope, directly upon the roof of the ranch-house. Thus our man can be got inside the lines of the guards. Then, by means of the door in the roof, he can enter the house, and if good luck favors him he may find the stolen girl and gain the roof with her. At a signal which will be arranged the entire crew will be ready to draw the pair up on board the aeronef to safety."

"The plan you have suggested strikes me as being a feasible one. But it will be fraught with great danger to the man who undertakes to venture into the Mexican's house," said Kenneth.

"Nevertheless, I shall make the attempt," replied Frank.

"No. I will go. It is for me to save the girl I love. I will not allow you or any one to go in my place," cried Kenneth.

"All right! You are a noble fellow, and if you don't succeed you must be under an evil star, for certainly right and justice are on your side."

"Yes. And I will rescue Mollie, or we shall both perish. Oh, I thank Providence for sending me such a friend as you are proving yourself to be in this my hour of need."

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow," replied Frank.

Just then Beam and Driggs came up, and the former said, humbly:

"Mr. Reade, won't you give Driggs and myself another chance? We are sincerely penitent, and we bind ourselves by a solemn vow to be honest and faithful in every way if you will only let us remain. Ghost or no ghost—we have made up our minds to stand by the Queen Clipper as long as you do, if you will only let us. We mean to prove how grateful we really are for our preservation from the Mexicans."

Frank thought a moment before he replied.

At first he was inclined to refuse the request of the rascal, but then his natural kindness of heart overruled his better judgment.

He decided to give the two men another trial, and the idea came to him that he might greatly need their services yet, in case he did not succeed in solving the ghost mystery.

So he said at last:

"Very well. I'll test your sincerity. For the present, at least, you may remain on board."

The two villains protested their gratitude loudly, and Frank told them to "drop it all" and go about their duties as before.

Smith Brown had overheard all, and presently he and the two villains were conversing in low tones within the stern cabin.

"You mean really yet to help me seize the airship when the favorable opportunity comes?" asked the insane professor.

"You bet we do, by gosh," asserted Beam.

"Correct," said Driggs, emphatically.

"Good! Then my original plot shall be worked out," the maniac said, exultantly.

"I hope so," replied Beam, "but you want to warn Hall that he will have to be mighty careful how he plays ghost next time, or else Frank Reade will let daylight through him."

"I have already done so," answered Smith Brown.

Meantime the Queen Clipper sailed eastward.

Night soon came on and the darkness was complete. At about midnight the aeronef returned and hung above the Mexican's ranch. The building was located by the light of camp fires the Indians who were on guard all around it had built.

The aeronef was kept at such an elevation that the illumination of the fires could not disclose it to the enemy.

Everything had been prepared for the novel method of rescue which was now about to be undertaken.

The rope cable, by which Kenneth Lake was to be lowered to the roof of Don Alverado's ranch house, was wound on a great windlass, and its convenient handles were so arranged that six men could man them, and by turning the cranks, rapidly lower or draw up any considerable weight attached to the end of the cable.

Frank personally superintended the arrangement of the windlass, for he did not mean that any avoidable oversight should contribute to the failure of the project.

When all was in readiness Frank said to Kenneth:

"Now I'll strap my little portable battery on you. But stay, have you put on the shirt of mail I gave you?"

"Yes," replied Kenneth.

Then Frank strapped his portable electric battery on Kenneth's back, like a soldier's knapsack. The young man drew on the gloves of chain-mail,

fined with non-conductors which went with the battery, and then Frank ran the conducting wires from the battery down his arms to the gloves and there connected them. These wires were so fine and flexible as not to interfere in the least with the freedom of arm movement.

"You have now only to touch a person with your gloves to shock them severely. Take care that you disconnect the wires before you embrace your sweetheart, if you are fortunate enough to find her," said Frank.

Kenneth assured his friend that he should not neglect his caution.

He carried in his belt a brace of revolvers and a

silver bell musically chimed the signal that Kenneth was safely inside the Mexican's dwelling. There ensued a period of suspense for the men of the aeronef.

Meantime, having alighted on the flat roof of the large adobe dwelling, Kenneth experienced no difficulty in opening the door in the roof.

After listening a moment he began to grope his way down a flight of narrow stairs, upon which the door opened.

But first, of course, he removed the noose of the cable-rope from beneath his shoulders, and knotted it about a chimney close to the door. He also disconnected the wires on his electric gloves.

Then the young man closed the door and secured it to its place, thus securing it.

The rescuer was now alone in a well furnished sleeping-room with the old Mexican.

Seeing that, though his blow had momentarily stunned the villain, he was about to regain his senses Kenneth thrust the muzzle of his weapon against his head.

When the don regained consciousness Kenneth hissed:

"Tell me where to find Mollie Marion or by heavens I'll end your wicked life on the spot!"

The Mexican knew the American meant what he said, and he did not dare trifle with him.



At sunset they witnessed a remarkable scene. The god of day shot forth a halo of multi-colored rays as it sank in the waves like a vanishing aurora borealis.

knife. A dark lantern ready lighted, but with the slide closed, was hooked in a button-hole of his coat on his breast. He would only have to touch the slide to procure a brilliant light from the bull's-eye.

It was arranged that if he got into the house all right by the door in the roof he was to pull the rope twice. When he wanted to signal to draw up he was to jerk the rope three times. Every pull of the rope would ring a tiny silver bell that could not be heard on the ground, which would be attached to the cable after Kenneth descended.

CHAPTER XLI.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER—THE ELECTRIC GLOVES—GREAT PERIL.

FINALLY, having made all his personal preparations, Kenneth slipped the noosed rope under his arms, and he was lowered downward.

The camp-fires had now died down, so that the descending form was in no danger of being discovered by the Mexicans' Indian guards.

In a moment Kenneth was lost to the sight of the crew on the air-ship, in the dark void beneath it. Some moments elapsed and all listened intently, waiting for the first signal from the young American.

Presently the rope was jerked twice, and the lit-

As he crept down the stairs noiselessly, Kenneth paused every few steps and listened intently.

He did not mean to neglect any precaution that might contribute to the success of his dangerous venture.

Silence reigned within the house, and Kenneth presently reached the foot of the stairs. When he arrived there he paused, and he was just about to venture to turn on the light of his dark-lantern when he heard footsteps.

The very next instant a door not two feet distant from the young American opened, and a brilliant light streamed forth.

Kenneth sprang backward.

Too late! He was discovered by Don Alverado himself, who came through the open door whence the light emanated.

It was an intensely thrilling crisis.

The Mexican, astounded at the unexpected sight of the young rescuer, was for an instant speechless. But he had opened his lips to shout an alarm when Kenneth darted forward and aimed a blow at his head with his clubbed revolver.

The blow told. Dropping a pistol which he had snatched from his belt the Mexican fell across the threshold.

Kenneth seized him and dragged him entirely into the apartment whence he had come.

"Will you spare me if I tell where the senorita is?" asked Don Alverado.

"Yes," replied Kenneth. "Now, speak instantly, and beware that you do not attempt to deceive me."

"You will find the girl in the third room from this, east. You have only to follow the hall."

"Good. Now I'll bind and gag you and then to the rescue of Mollie," said Kenneth.

The Mexican's eyes blazed with fury.

"You need not bind or gag me. I give you the word of a Mexican don that I'll give no alarm."

"Bah! You Mexican dons care no more for your word than the most treacherous red savage of the plains. I'm not verdant enough to believe you," said Kenneth, in sneering tones.

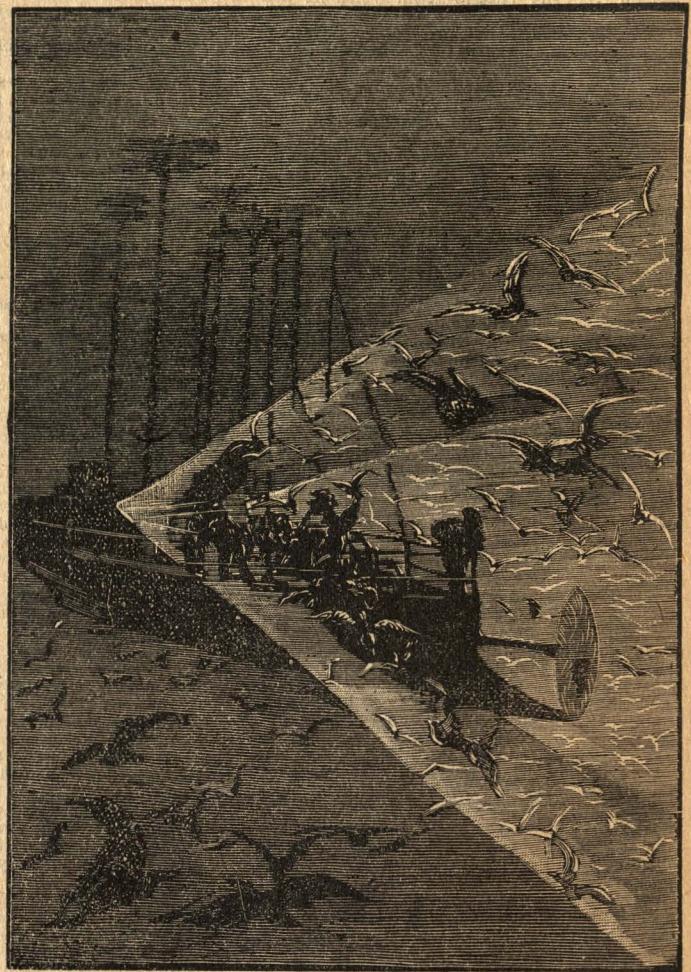
Then, under the threat of death if he resisted, the Mexican submitted to be bound.

"Now I'll leave you. But if I do not find Mollie I'll come back to settle with you presently," said Kenneth.

Then he passed out of the room, having first, however, extinguished the light there.

He went along the dark hall, feeling his way along the wall and counting the doors he felt. At the third one east he paused and listened.

"Perhaps if Mollie is in this room she is not alone!" Kenneth thought.



That night, while the Queen Clipper was sailing onward with the electric light radiating ahead of it in a diverging plane of brilliant illumination, a great flock of sea-gulls was encountered. The air was full of those tireless birds of the ocean.

"Any should have made the old Mexican tell me at," he added mentally.

Gently then he tried the door. It yielded and he entered.

The next moment Mollie Marion was in his arms. The young girl was reclining on a couch in her costume of the day. The room was faintly illuminated. She was awake and she saw Kenneth as he entered and sprang to meet him.

But on a blanket close beside the door lay a peon woman whom Don Alverado had ordered to watch Mollie.

As Kenneth entered the room the peon glided out.

Then she closed the door.

Hearing the sound, Kenneth wheeled like a flash, and rushing to the door found it fast.

"Trapped! Now, Mollie, we can only hope to die together!" cried Kenneth in despair.

"It was old Kadra. She was on the blanket inside the door. The cunning creature must have stepped out as you came in," explained Mollie.

"By heavens, I'll make a try to escape yet!" exclaimed Kenneth, and he rushed against the door furiously. It flew open, for his furious onset had broken the bolt.

"Follow me, I cannot give you my hand, for I want to be ready to make use of electric gloves I now wear!" said Kenneth to Mollie as he attached wires to his gloves, in an instant.

Then he darted forward.

At that moment the hall, between him and the stairs leading to the roof, thronged with Indians and peons. Old Kadra had lost not an instant in giving the alarm. A part of the band was quartered in a large room on that floor. They promptly rushed out.

Like a flash Kenneth drew a revolver in each hand.

The enemy carried lights and he did not need to use his dark lantern then.

There was no time for parley. To stop to talk was to make sure of doom. Kenneth opened fire and charged at the enemy with Mollie close at his side.

The Indians and the peons were only prevented from returning the young American's volley by the fear that they might hit Mollie, for Don Alverado had issued orders that the maiden was not to be injured under any circumstances.

The fact was, the old villain meant to make her his wife the next day. Mollie's villainous step-father, who had sold her to the don, was even then under that roof, and it was the feature of the compact between him and the Mexican that Mollie should become the latter's wife without delay.

In a moment Kenneth reached the foremost of the enemy. They felt sure of overpowering him in a hand-to-hand fight. But they did not know about the electric gloves.

As soon as he was in reach of the Indians and the peons, Kenneth relied on Frank Reade's wonderful gloves, and in a moment he was shocking the enemy right and left. Half a dozen of them were overthrown in as many seconds.

Then they fled, feeling convinced that they had encountered the evil one himself in disguise.

"Bad medicine! Bad medicine!" cried the Indians.

"Caramba! Evil hand!" shouted the peons.

The way was clear and Kenneth and Mollie sprang to the stairs. But old Kadra, the peon woman, had now liberated Don Alverado.

The young American and his sweetheart were not out of peril yet. All at once, as they were about to ascend the stairs, the door of the old don's apartment opened and he rushed out.

In his hand the old Mexican clutched his revolver and he fired point blank at Kenneth. The bullet sped by the head of the young American so close that it clipped away a lock of his hair.

Don Alverado was about to fire again when Kenneth, who had discharged his last shot, hurled one of his empty pistols at him with terrific force, knowing that the next shot fired by his enemy would probably hit him.

As Kenneth's pistol whizzed through the air, the old Mexican dodged.

CHAPTER XLII.

A WEDDING ON THE QUEEN CLIPPER—FRANK AND THE "GHOST."

THOUGH he sought to evade the weapon which the young American threw at him, as described, the movement of the old don was not swift enough to elude the missile.

Kenneth's pistol struck him on the temple, and he went down all in a heap, knocked senseless by the heavy blow.

Then up the stairs leading to the roof ran the devoted lovers. Gaining the roof, Kenneth fastened the door of the head of the stairs, and discarding the electric gloves, noosed the cable-rope about himself and Mollie. Losing not a moment then he gave the signal, and he and the rescued

maiden were drawn up in safety to the deck of the electric air-ship.

Of course the lovers were warmly congratulated on their escape, and Mollie Marion was assigned one of the cabins, to which she retired to seek much needed rest after the exciting scenes and perilous experiences through which she had passed.

Frank and Kenneth discussed the future.

The latter said:

"I have obtained Mollie's consent to our immediate union. The Texan border is not many miles distant, and I know an old minister at a town on the United States side of the Rio Grande who will marry us."

"Then there shall be no delay in getting there. Once you are married, you will become Mollie's legal protector, and her rascally stepfather will have no authority over your wife."

"I had thought of that, and I fear Mollie's step-father will make desperate efforts to recapture my betrothed for Don Alverado."

"Well, if you do not outwit the old fellow it shall be through no lack of assistance on my part."

"I thank you from my heart, Mr. Reade."

"That's all right. I was in love myself once, and though I was not compelled to fight for my bride, I know just how you feel, and you have my sympathy," replied Frank.

In the morning the air vessel was over the river country of Mexico, and, piloted by Kenneth, the aerial vessel reached the village the young man had mentioned.

There a descent was made, and the minister, whom Kenneth knew, was brought on board the Queen Clipper. There, on the deck of the noble ship of the air, the faithful lovers were made man and wife.

Frank Reade and the crew of the air-ship acted as witnesses of the ceremony.

The young inventor had caused an elegant wedding breakfast to be prepared, and the happy couple and their friends were enjoying it in the dining-saloon, when Barney entered quietly and passing to Frank's side, made some communication which evidently surprised the inventor.

Just then there was a commotion at the door of the saloon which Pomp was guarding, and then a tall, ungainly man of middle age, whose face would not have won him favor with a jury if on trial for a crime, forced his way into the room.

"My step-father, Christopher Meanwell!" exclaimed Mollie, as she saw the intruder.

"Yas, miss. An' I'm hay'r to take ye hum. Things is comin' ter a putty pass when a young gal runs away from her legal gardeene, same as I'm young, an' yer step-father, too," said Meanwell.

Pomp had caught his queer name when Mollie uttered it, and he said, audibly:

"Gollie! Youse oughter be named Meanman!"

"Am I, Christopher Meanwell, High Constable o' Broomville, Texas, ter be insulted by a nigger? No!" cried Meanwell, feeling for his pistol.

But Pomp made a leap and jerked the pistol out of the fellow's grasp as he drew it out of his pocket.

"When yer want ter go gunnin' fer coon nex' time be sure dat you'se got de game treed afore you pulls yer gun," advised Pomp.

"I never fight with a nigger," rejoined Meanwell, disdainfully.

Then to Mollie, coming toward her:

"You hev got ter go home with me, gal, an' I reckon you'll go willin', fer I come ter tell ye that I've just found out fer a dead certainty that Kenneth Lake is a married man."

"What! Oh, you scoundrel! How dare you?" cried Kenneth.

"How dare a feller tell the truth? You can't deny it. You have a wife," retorted Meanwell.

"Yes; and here she is. Allow me to introduce Mrs. Kenneth Lake," said Kenneth, rising and taking Mollie's hand.

Meanwell fairly gasped, and he cried:

"You don't mean it! It ain't so!"

"Certain sure, mister. Here's the marriage certificate," cried Kenneth, producing the paper.

"Confound the Irishman whom I met on deck. He has made a fool of me!" cried Meanwell. Then seeing Barney, who was enjoying the scene hugely, he shook his fist at him and added:

"Oh, you bogtrotting rascal! I'd like fer ter punch your head."

"It's welcome ye are to do that same, begob. Sure an' now is yer toime for a nate bit av a ruction. But bedad it was only the truth I was after tellin' ye, whin I informed yez that Mr. Kenneth was married, whin ye came on board inquirin' for him," said Barney.

"Tricked all round! Well, I wash my hands of you for good, Mollie Marion," said the disappointed villain, and he turned to the door.

"Begob, an' it's a bath ye nade, ye blackguard, and if there was a horsepond handy, yez shouldn't want for it long," retorted Barney.

Then Meanwell hastened from the saloon, and he lost no time in leaving the air-ship.

That day the aeronef conveyed Kenneth and his wife to Austin, and there left them with the happy groom's relatives, who were people of wealth and influence.

Some hours later the aerial wonder was sailing over the Gulf of Mexico. The doctor and Frank wished to observe some of the phenomenon of the gulfstream.

At sunset they witnessed a remarkable scene. The god of day shot forth a halo of multi-colored rays as it sank in the waves like a vanishing aurora borealis.

This was caused by cosmic dust which the earth was then passing through, and which reflected the last beams of the day.

That night, while the Queen Clipper was sailing onward with the electric light radiating ahead of it in a diverging plane of brilliant illumination, a great flock of sea-gulls was encountered. The air was full of those tireless birds of the ocean.

Frank, some time after the flock of sea-gulls had been left behind, retired to his cabin, but not to sleep. After midnight, when all save the engineers of the ship slept, he crept from his cabin stealthily.

He had not forgotten that time was passing swiftly, and that he had not solved the mystery of the ghost which he had promised to expose as a fraud.

With a dark lantern in his hand, Frank set out to explore the vessel's hold.

The idea had entered his mind that possibly a stowaway might have concealed himself there and be playing the role of the ghost.

Frank now meant to satisfy himself on this point positively.

In the bow cabin, at the same time, Smith Brown was preparing to descend to Steersman Hall's hiding-place, between the water-tank and the bulk-head.

The insane professor had smuggled some food out of the cook's galley undetected by Pomp, and he now meant to take that food to Hall.

"Ah, ha!" muttered the madman. "Not for long now shall I, Leonidas Wickersham, be subservient to this young intruder in the field of science—Frank Reade. No, no! The hour must soon come when I can throw off the mask and appear in my true character to confound this striping usurper of my ideas. He cannot, shall not, expose Hall. No, no! He shall, if it comes to that, die by my hand first!"

The maniac was terribly in earnest.

His pale features worked involuntarily, his eyes flashed, and if Frank could have looked in upon him at that moment, he would have suspected that the man was wrong mentally.

Smith Brown placed the food he had secured for Hall in a small basket, and then started to descend into the hold.

Meantime Frank was making his secret search there.

He began at the stern, and worked his way forward in the direction of the water-tank.

It seemed that he must discover Hall in hiding soon.

Frank finally arrived at the tank. But Hall had heard him approaching, and the steersman had seen Frank's face by the light of the dark-lantern. Hall had the "ghost's" robe on.

He saw no way of escaping discovery unless he could frighten Frank away. A moment of intense suspense for Hall elapsed. Then the young inventor turned the corner of the water-tank, and flashed the light forward from his lantern.

Instantly Frank recoiled, and whipped out a revolver.

Before him he saw a tall, ghostly form, and from it issued a terrible groan.

"Speak, you rascal! Tell me who you are or I fire!" thundered Frank.

But there was no answer, and the white figure began to advance.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FRANK AND THE GHOST—A NARROW ESCAPE.

FRANK READE'S situation was a decidedly unpleasant one. Here he was confronted by a white-robed, mysterious object at midnight. He had reason to believe that he and the apparition were alone in the hold of the air-ship.

While he was convinced that there was nothing supernatural about the appearance, at the same time certain considerations that at once occurred to his mind for a moment prevented any decisive action on Frank's part.

True enough he had shouted:

"Speak, you rascal! Tell me who you are, or I fire!"

But for all that, as the white form began to advance the young inventor was reluctant to press the trigger of the revolver which he held leveled at the mysterious figure.

And it is not difficult to conjecture what was passing in Frank's mind. Suppose he fired and killed the unknown, there were no witnesses. Besides having upon his mind thereafter the memory that he had taken a human life under circumstances that did not demand the deed for his own preservation, might not he find himself yet accused of a murder?

He was not unmindful of the fact that his secret enemy had not as yet been discovered. That unknown personage might testify in such a way as to seriously involve him in case he shot at the white mystery.

And so it came about that Frank hesitated.

Hall, of course, relied upon intimidating his discoverer. The steersman counted upon Frank's taking to flight.

But he realized his great peril when he saw that the captain of the air-ship was not to be easily frightened.

Hall feared for his life now, and of all things, he wished himself out of range of the leveled revolver that so nearly menaced him.

He paused, after taking a single forward step, and then as the resolution to attempt a sudden flight and elude Frank came to his mind, he beheld a dark object close behind the young inventor.

At a second glance Hall saw that the object in the rear of Frank was a man, and the succeeding instant he recognized Smith Brown.

Circumstances had formed a combination that now threatened to prove fatal to the hero of so many wonderful inventions and remarkable adventures.

The insane professor had discovered Frank searching the hold, while the former was on his way to carry the provisions he had secured down to the hiding place of Steersman Hall.

Seeing the young man, who had become the object of his unreasonable hatred, stealthily prowling about in the hold at dead of night with a dark lantern, it did not require an exercise of any great degree of perspicuity on the maniac's part to divine his purpose.

"Hal! He is secretly searching for the ghost. I'll follow him, and if he finds Hall he shall not live to make known his discovery," mentally decided the desperado insane man.

Then he crept after Frank.

Smith Brown moved noiselessly, and, of course, the young inventor was entirely ignorant of his proximity, and entertained no suspicion of his great peril.

But a few seconds had elapsed, after Frank discovered the ghost, and Hall had just discovered Smith Brown, when the maniac made a sudden leap at the inventor.

The succeeding instant a clubbed pistol clutched in the hand of the crazy professor, descended with force upon the head of the imperiled captain of the Queen Clipper.

Frank fell, stunned, and as his senses forsook him he remained motionless, at the mercy of his maniac foe. In all his career the inventor had never been in greater danger, for Smith Brown sprang upon him and the long, powerful fingers of his muscular, bony hands clutched the throat of the insensible man.

The maniac's eyes blazed with a lurid light. His breath came pantingly, and his features were convulsed. His mad fury was a frightful exhibition of murderous purpose.

Steersman Hall was appalled.

Though he was inclined to hate Frank for unjustly punishing him, the steersman was by no means willing, now that the inventor was in the maniac's power, to allow him to be murdered in cold blood.

The better impulses of man rebelled against the perpetration of such a crime. He could not remain a passive witness of the murder.

The dark lantern which Frank held when he was struck down had fallen from his hand and overturned, but it had not been extinguished.

Hall righted the lantern, and then came at Smith Brown.

"Hold!" he exclaimed in determined tones. "You shall not kill him!"

"And why not? Is he not in the way of our plot to secure the air-ship? What better chance to rid ourselves of him than this can come?" retorted the maniac, without releasing his hold on Frank's throat.

Hall seized Smith Brown by the shoulders, and dragged him away from Frank by main force. The steersman was a powerful man, but it required all his strength to hurl the maniac aside.

Then Smith Brown's fury turned upon Hall.

"Fool!" he hissed. "Do you dare set yourself above me? I am king of the air, and you are only one of my humble subjects. I say Frank Reade shall die!"

The maniac again sprang forward to seize the helpless inventor. But Hall interposed, and the two men clinched. Then for a moment or two they struggled desperately.

Hall's superior strength, however, finally triumphed, and he threw Smith Brown heavily. The madman's head came in violent contact with the floor as he fell, and he was as completely stunned as Frank Reade.

"How to carry Reade beyond Smith Brown's reach before the latter recovers!" exclaimed Hall. "Despite the wrong he has done me, he shall not be made the victim of a cowardly murder."

As he spoke, he raised the young inventor in his strong arms, and carried him swiftly away to his cabin. Having deposited Frank on the couch in his cabin, and assured himself by a hasty examination that the young man would soon regain his senses, Hall hastened back to the place where he had left Smith Brown.

The maniac was sitting up, holding his head in his hands. He was very pale, but the frenzied look had gone from his eyes. It was evident to the steersman that his fit of murderous fury had passed away.

"I hope you are more reasonable now. When I consented to help you seize the air-ship, I did not agree to become a party to cowardly murder," said Hall.

"Perhaps it is best, as you think, to spare Reade now, since his death would compel a premature development of our plot," assented Smith Brown, who now seemed inclined to be reasonable.

"But you are no longer safe here. Have you thought of that?" he added.

"Yes, I must now find a new hiding-place, and one in which Frank Reade will consider it impossible for me to conceal myself. After this he will undoubtedly ransack the entire vessel in quest of me."

"He will be sure to do so. But even so he shall still be outwitted," replied the insane professor.

"Do I understand, then, that you have thought of a hiding-place, in which I may elude the close search that will ensue?"

"Yes, you know the magazine is always kept locked, and Frank Reade, Jr., carries the only key he believes to be in existence. He will find the door of the magazine locked, and I am reasonably certain he will not search the place. You shall be concealed in the magazine."

"But how—"

"I have made a duplicate key to the magazine," interrupted Smith Brown.

"Yes, ah, I understand. I must risk it. The magazine is the only hiding-place that may prove a refuge to me now."

"Then come at once. No time must be lost in getting you secreted in it."

"That's so. Come; I'll carry Reade's lantern. But stay! Perhaps I had better turn off the light."

"By all means. We must not run the risk of the light attracting Reade's attention. Will he soon recover from my blow, think you?"

"Yes," replied Hall. Then, having closed the slide of the dark lantern, he led the way to the door of the magazine.

Having reached it, Smith Brown produced his duplicate key and unlocked the door. Hall entered, and Smith Brown gave him the provisions he had brought and also the key of the door.

"Now you can lock the door on the inside, I will not let you want for food, and you can slip out late at night for water. The tank will still supply you. Keep close now until the time Frank Reade asked for in which to lay the ghost has passed," said the insane professor.

"And then?" asked Hall.

"Then you must once more appear as an apparition and thoroughly frighten the crew. The timid will desert. Then I shall lead a mutiny and the ship is ours," replied Smith Brown, confidently.

A moment later Hall was alone in the magazine with the door locked and the key in his pocket.

Smith Brown returned immediately to his post in the stern cabin.

Some time subsequently Frank returned to consciousness. He experienced a severe vertigo, and his head ached. But the maniac's blow had not injured his skull, and, after bathing his head freely in cold water and taking a glass or two of wine, he felt much better.

His last recollection was of facing the white-robed form in the hold, and at first he was astounded at finding himself in his own cabin. But as his mind cleared, he understood that he had been knocked senseless by a blow from behind, and that he must have been carried into his cabin by his assailants, since he had been left alone there while still unconscious.

Frank meditated deeply for a few moments, and then he went to Dr. Vaneyke's cabin and awakened the old scientist.

In a few words the young inventor acquainted his old friend with the incidents that had just transpired, and both were exceedingly perplexed and mystified.

CHAPTER XLIV.

OVER THE ATLANTIC—RESCUED SAILORS—A VOLCANIC ERUPTION.

AFTER some discussion Frank and the doctor decided to search the hold in company, and having armed themselves and procured a lantern, they began their task.

Carefully they searched every portion of the vessel, but they found no trace of the white robed mystery. At last, as they were returning to the doctor's cabin in disappointment at their failure, they came to the magazine.

Frank tried the door, and finding it secured, he passed on, remarking:

"I carry the only key to the ammunition room, no one can enter there."

Neither Frank nor the doctor obtained any more sleep that night, and the young inventor began to be very seriously troubled by the thought that after all he might find it impossible to detect the ghost in the time he had specified.

It was, of course, clear to him now that there was more than one person engaged in the deception, for certainly a confederate of the man who impersonated the ghost had struck him down.

Not unnaturally a suspicion of Beam and Driggs entered Frank's mind. Those two rascals had been on duty, during the night, with Barney in the bow engine house.

In the morning Frank called the Irishman aside and asked:

"Were you in 'the bow cabin all last night?"

"Faith, an' I was, sur. Beam and Driggs came on duty just before midnight, and thin I wint to me bunk in the end av the bow cabin. But, begob, I didn't go to sleep for an hour or two. Indade the clock struck two before I was aither closin' av the two eyes av me."

"Could you see Beam and Driggs all that time?"

"Sure, an' I could that. I was watchin' av them an' listenin' to the talk they wuz havin', for be my soul, I'm aither distrustin' the blackguards yet."

"Did either of them leave the bow cabin between midnight and two o'clock?"

"Indade an' they did not, sur."

"Are you sure?"

"Faith, an' I am that."

"Very good! That's all, Barney," replied Frank, and he turned away, convinced that Beam and Driggs were not concerned in the ghost mystery, for he had encountered the white-robed form at about one o'clock.

Frank knew not whom to suspect after that.

Meantime the course of the air-ship was due east, and that day the West India Islands were sighted. The Queen Clipper passed over Cuba and through their glasses Frank and the doctor obtained an excellent view of tropical scenery.

But the islands were soon left behind, and the aeronet maintained her course over the Atlantic Ocean.

Toward midday the lookout sighted a distant sail through his glass.

"Sail ahoy!" he shouted.

"Where away?" cried Frank.

"Due east."

The inventor swept the surface of the ocean in the direction indicated with his glass, and presently he caught sight of the distant sail.

The course of the Queen Clipper was toward the sail when it was sighted; no change of direction was therefore made.

The air vessel continued to bear down on the sail, and it gradually developed as the intervening distance was diminished, until Frank saw a small open boat, with a single sail, drifting at the mercy of the waves.

In the boat he could discern the figure of a man kneeling in the bow, with his hands clasped in supplication. Evidently he had sighted the Queen Clipper, and was praying for deliverance.

On came the air ship, and Frank and the crew were immediately convinced that they had come upon shipwrecked sailors, for beside the man kneeling in the bow of the boat, two others lay in the bottom of the small craft.

The face of the kneeling man was pale and haggard, and everything in his appearance indicated that he was a victim of privation and suffering.

"Who are you?" shouted Frank presently.

"Shipwrecked sailors! For God's sake save us! We have been drifting in this open boat for fourteen days, and all our food and water is gone," came back the answer from the kneeling man in faint, husky tones, as though his parched throat had almost lost the power of articulation.

At the sound of his voice the two other men in the bottom of the boat started up and lifted a pair of worn, hollow-eyed faces, to look up at the ship of the sky.

Then a faint shout of joy came from the poor fellows, and they wept like children as Frank shouted:

"You are saved. I'll have you all safe on board my air vessel in a few moments."

Then he ordered the Queen Clipper to be lowered, and when she was within about fifty feet of the water, a noosed cable was lowered. One of the ship-wrecked sailors caught it, and then the three men were successively drawn up from the boat to the deck of the aeronef by means of the cable.

The poor fellows were well cared for in every way and when they had told their story, which was an ordinary narrative that need not be herein recorded, Frank knew they wanted to make the port of New Orleans. So, as he had no desire to continue his voyage over the ocean, he put back, and

The air vessel was low down over the range. Frank had ordered a descent, so as to give the doctor an opportunity to scan the craters of the seemingly extinct volcanoes which they were passing.

All at once there came a tremendous roaring, hissing sound, which seemed to emanate from the very heart of the mountain, and the succeeding moment one of the craters, that had appeared to be entirely extinct, exploded with a terrific report, sending up a torrent of smoke, flames and fragments of rock. The air was filled with the dense black earth in a cloud, and the Queen Clipper was caught in the eruption.

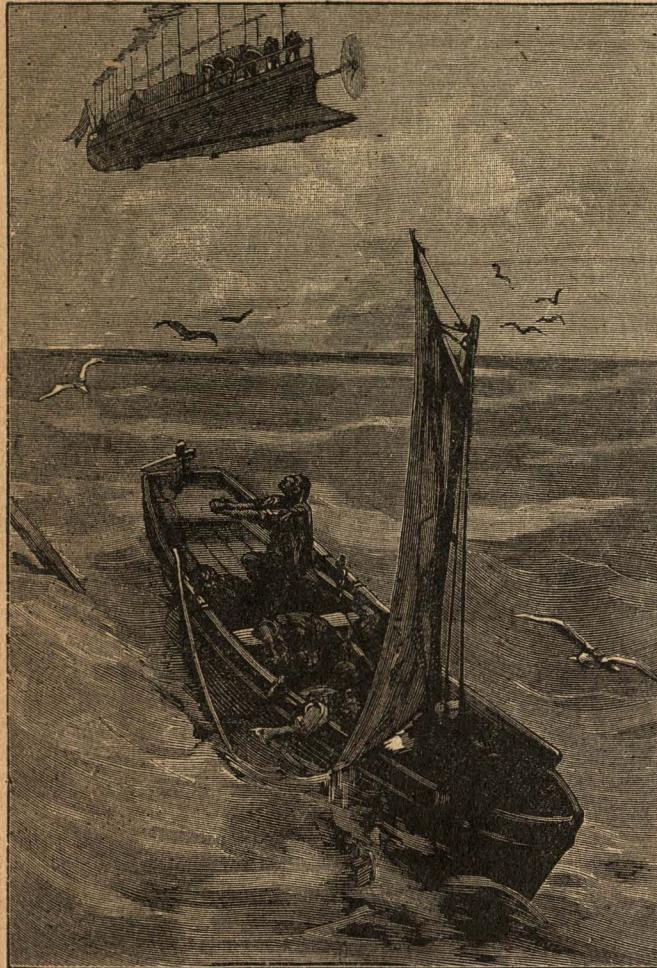
Thrilling adventures were presently to ensue, though Frank did not anticipate them.

CHAPTER XLV.

A DUEL ON BOARD THE QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS.

The Indians claimed the territory as a part of a tract ceded to them by treaty with the United States Government.

Tempted, however, by the exceeding fertility of the soil and the manifold beauties of the country, many white settlers ventured to establish homes in the disputed land.



Frank saw a small open boat, with a single sail, drifting at the mercy of the waves. In the boat he could discern the figure of a man kneeling in the bow, with his hands clasped in supplication. Evidently he had sighted the Queen Clipper, and was praying for deliverance.

In a few hours the Queen Clipper landed the rescued sailors safely in New Orleans.

The city is about one hundred miles from the gulf, and leaving it, the Queen Clipper sailed west. Doctor Vaneyke had gone on land in the city and purchased newspapers and magazines. In one of the latter named periodicals, he found an article on volcanoes which interested him, for the paper was really a scientific one.

Then the idea occurred to him that now was an opportunity to visit the chain of volcanic mountains that cross the highest portion of the plateau of Mexico.

Though the air-ship had been nearer them than now on a previous occasion the doctor had not made the investigations relating to their phenomena, which were now suggested to his mind.

Of course when the doctor proposed, as he presently did, that they should cruise over the volcanoes of Mexico, Frank readily assented.

A rapid voyage before favorable winds ensued.

The volcanic range was reached in a space of time that seemed incredibly short to those even who had now become familiar with the wonderful speed the Queen Clipper could attain.

But as the lofty peaks of the volcanic range were below the air vessel, and in the southward they could see the lofty summit of Popocatepetl, the highest mountain except Mount St. Elias in North America, a great peril suddenly came upon the Queen Clipper without a warning.

Every one on board the Queen Clipper was terror stricken, and the danger was as intense as thrilling.

But prompt action saved the aeronef.

The suspensory helices were made to revolve at lightning speed, and the air vessel shot upward beyond the reach of the volcanic eruption.

Therefore, greater caution was maintained, and the vessel did not again venture so perilously close to the craters of the volcanoes, even though no external evidence of the activity of the eruptive mountains could be discerned.

The doctor, however, had excellent opportunities for making the observations he was interested in, and he was almost constantly busy with his note-book, while the cruise over the volcanic range continued:

When the whole length of the range had been sailed over the doctor expressed himself as well satisfied with the information he had gained, and the Queen Clipper once more sailed northward.

Recently Frank had been reading a great deal about Oklahoma, the strip of Indian territory claimed by the Indians, and named by them. The "boomers," or white settlers, were being driven out of the Territory by United States soldiers. The Indians were on the war-path, and the young inventor thought it would be an interesting country to cruise over. Accordingly the Queen Clipper was headed for the disputed land.

The white settlers or boomers, asserted that the Indians laid claim to more of the land than the government had ceded to them, and the lines were disputed.

At this period there were very exciting times in Oklahoma.

When from his observations, Frank was sure that the Queen Clipper was over Oklahoma, the vessel was brought down to a distance of about a hundred feet from the earth's surface, and at that elevation the cruise was continued.

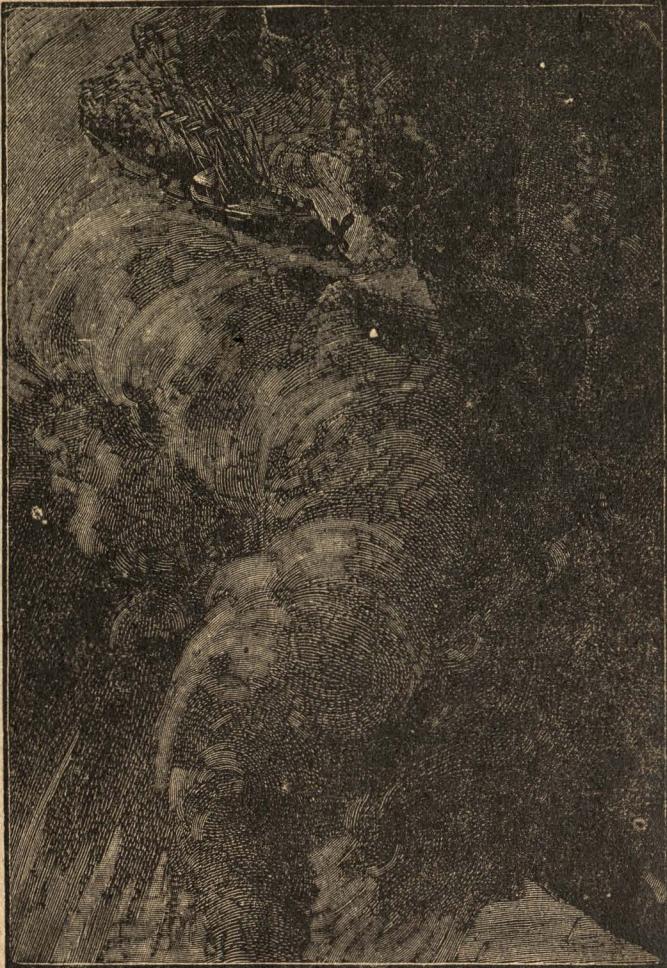
A panorama of the most beautiful natural scenery the human eye ever dwelt upon was unfolded. There were sylvan dells, verdant plains, delightful groves and green meadows, dotted with springs, and clear sparkling streams abounded.

All at once a column of smoke was discovered, and presently a thrilling scene burst upon the view of the aerial voyagers.

They beheld an isolated settler's cabin wrapped in flames and surrounded by a band of yelling Indians.

Frank did not hesitate for a moment, but at once ordered his crew to open fire on the savages, for, by reason of an occasional rifle shot from the burning cabin, he was convinced that white persons were besieged within it.

All hands at once sprang to arms, and a fusilade of rifle balls were discharged among the Indians.



One of the craters, that had appeared to be entirely extinct, exploded with a terrific report, sending up a torrent of smoke, flames and fragments of rock. The air was filled with the dense black earth in a cloud, and the Queen Clipper was caught in the eruption.

Barney and Pomp worked their repeating rifles as rapidly as possible, and the two seemed to enjoy the fight.

The Indians broke for an adjacent cover almost immediately, for the destructive volley from the air-ship was more than they coul' face, and, of course, the singular appearance of the air-ship awakened their superstitious fears.

As soon as the enemy had fled a man and woman rushed from the burning cabin, each carrying a small child.

Frank Reade had arrived just in time to save the settler and his family.

The young inventor shouted to the white fugitives, and then, for the first time, they saw the Queen Clipper and understood whence assistance had come.

The settler and his family halted upon discovering the air vessel, and the aeronef swept downward and soon came to rest gently upon the green meadow.

Then the rescued family was taken on board, and the settler assured Frank that he was just making preparations to join a band of boomers who, having been warned off by the U. S. troops sent to expel the settlers, were on the march from the territory.

The party making the enforced exodus was supposed by the settler to then be about ten miles further north, marching under escort of the soldiers, who were really driving them out of the beautiful land.

As the settler desired to join the expelled boomers, Frank volunteered to convey him and his family to the party mentioned forthwith.

Accordingly the Queen Clipper at once ascended into its natural element—the atmosphere—and set out to overtake the boomers.

Meantime the rescued settler related heart-rending stories of the brutality and injustice of a certain Captain Black in charge of the troopers sent to expel the boomers.

"Black must be a villain and he deserves punishment," commented Frank, who sympathized with the settlers.

Very soon he sighted a moving column of settlers in wagons, on horseback and on foot. There were men, women and children, all huddled together, and beside the train and in the rear rode a company of U. S. cavalry.

As the air-ship drew near the train, although it was not as yet discovered by the pilgrim settlers or the soldiers, the young inventor witnessed a scene that made his blood boil, and gave him sufficient evidence that the charges made against Captain Black were true.

An aged settler, apparently fatigued with long marching at an enforced pace, straggled along at the rear of the column on foot. A man in the uniform of a cavalry captain, who was driving up the stragglers, rode to the side of the poor old man, and cursed him savagely for not going faster.

The old man replied plaintively:

"I can walk no faster. If you will give me back my horse, which you took from me when your animal went lame, I will keep up with the rest."

"I'll make you keep up. You are only shamming to get a place in the ambulance. Take that, you old rascal," retorted the captain.

As he spoke the brutal villain began to belabor the exhausted old man with the flat of his saber.

The sight filled Frank Reade with righteous indignation.

"Hold there, you infernal scoundrel!" shouted the young inventor, almost involuntarily.

Captain Black uttered a furious exclamation and glanced about, seeking to determine who had spoken.

Then he caught sight of the Queen Clipper. The Western newspapers had recently published some accounts of Frank's last invention, and Captain Black had read the same, so, as soon as he saw the aeronef, he muttered:

"Frank Reade, Jr., and his air-ship by all that's bad?"

Then he shouted back to the young inventor:

"Who are you?"

"Frank Reade, Jr., at your service, and if you dare to further abuse that old man I'll chastise you," replied the inventor.

Frank's blood was up and he did not pause to consider consequences.

"Begob, masther, dear, lave me down at him. Sure an' it's meself as will bate the head at him blackguard," said Barney.

"Golly, Mars Frank; if youse jiss luff me slide on ter der groun' at de end ob a rope, dis chile will butt dat sojer man clean inter de middle ob next week," Pomp promised.

"Silence!" cried Frank as Captain Black shouted:

"You called me a scoundrel!"

"I did," replied Frank.

"An' struck yer right name, de fust pop," added Pomp.

"I'm a soldier and a gentleman."

"I never would have guessed you were the latter," replied Frank.

"Furies! You have insulted me!"

"Well, what of it?" "You must fight me, sir. I am Captain Black of the United States Army, sir!"

"Yes, I s'pees dat youse black clean through. Black-hearted you is fo' sure," put in Pomp.

"Will you be quiet?" said Frank, smiling, and then he said in reply to Black:

"Do you mean to challenge me?"

"Yes, sir. I demand satisfaction on the field of honor. I challenge you to meet me in a duel."

Frank never, under any circumstances, showed the white feather. He did not believe in dueling, but he wasn't going to be bluffed by such a man as Black.

"All right! I shall be happy to accommodate you when and where you please," he replied.

"Then we fight here and now," shouted Black.

"Anything to accommodate you," replied Frank, and he ordered the engineers to lower the air vessel.

The suspensory helices and the propellers were gradually slowed up, and the Queen Clipper came down upon the earth with scarcely a jar.

Meantime the column of boomers had halted.

No sooner did the Queen Clipper reach the earth than an orderly, sent by Black, came on board.

"I represent Captain Black, and as you are the challenged party you have the choice of weapons. What is your choice?" said the orderly to Frank.

"Pistols," replied the young inventor.

"All right! But I warn you that you had better apologize to Captain Black. He is a dead shot with the pistol, and he has fought at least a dozen duels and killed his man every time," said the orderly.

"Very well. I'm not dead yet, and while I live I'll never apologize to such a brutal bully as Black, and you can tell him so," replied Frank, warmly.

"An' if any more av yez blackguards av the world want a bit av a ruction, sure it's mesel', Barney O'Shea, that wull accommodate them!" said the fighting Irishman.

But the orderly did not heed them, and went on arranging for the duel with Frank. It was decided that the men should fight at ten paces, on the deck of the air-ship. The orderly was to second Captain Black, and Dr. Vaneyke consented to act in the same capacity for Frank. But the good old man was strongly opposed to the whole affair.

Soon Black came on board, and then Frank and the officer took their places and stood facing each other.

Dr. Vaneyke was to give the word to fire.

All the crew of the air-ship was drawn up on the side of the deck to give free range to the bullets of the duelists.

The soldiers crowded around the vessel to witness the duel, and a moment of thrilling suspense ensued, while all waited for the doctor to pronounce the word "Fire!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RESULT OF THE DUEL—BARNEY AND POMP GET INTO TROUBLE.

THERE WAS a marked difference in the manner and appearance of the two men who were about to engage in the deadly duel on board the Queen Clipper.

Frank Reade's face was slightly pale, and his expression was calm and earnest. He did not show fear of his antagonist, but he impressed the witnesses of the scene as understanding the full danger of the situation.

Captain Black's face was flushed as with anger, and his expression was confident and aggressive. He looked as if he was entirely confident of the issue of the battle. Evidently he counted on certain victory.

Frank's friends were anxious and somewhat fearful, and Barney whispered to Pomp:

"Be the harp av Tara if the blackguard av the worruld hits Masther Frank, sure an' I'll challenge him myself to fight a jewel wid shillalahs at a hundred paces. Bad scran till the loikes av him!"

But as Barney thus spoke Dr. Vaneyke pronounced the word "Fire."

As the signal word passed the doctor's lips the two duelists discharged their pistols almost simultaneously. Indeed, the two reports sounded as one single detonation.

The next instant a yell burst from the lips of Captain Black, and dropping his dueling pistol, he staggered back with a shattered arm. It was his pistol arm that Frank's bullet had struck.

But what of the young inventor?

He stood unharmed, but Captain Black's bullet had passed so close to his head that its "whizz" rang in his ears yet.

A shout went up from the crew of the Queen Clipper at Frank's victory. Then the brutal captain was assisted from the deck of the air-ship, air vessel.

and his second assured the good doctor that his principal was fully satisfied.

Barney was spoiling for a ruction, and getting a long pole, which lay on the deck, he knocked the cap from the head of a burly Dutch soldier, who was passing on the ground beside the air-ship.

The big soldier turned quickly, and caught Barney in the act of drawing back the stick.

"You vos knock mein caps mit mein head off! Py shiminy, I vos show you vellers dot you can't vos make foolishness py Hans Schnickelvurts! I vos fight mit you. If you dinks I vos a geese, I vos show you dot I vos a ganders. Yaw!" cried the soldier.

He was mad.

In fact he had his Dutch up.

Barney was delighted.

The next moment he jumped down from the deck, and threw off his coat, shouting:

"Whoop! Erin-go-bragh! Begob, it's a ruction I have sthruck at last! Faith, an' loife is worth livin' yet! But begob, a Dutchman is no match for an Irishman!"

"A fight! A fight!"

"Make a ring!"

Thus shouted the soldiers, and in a moment a circle was formed by the blue-coats around Barney and the big Dutchman.

Just then Pomp forced his way through the crowd.

"Gollie, I'se come fo' to see fair play for Barney, an' I'se got a razor in each boot-leg. I'se a barber when I'se workin' my professh. But if dar am any root ooms on de Irisher dis go, I'se gwine fo' to carve flesh!" cried the darky.

"Sure it's a gentleman ye are, Pomp, if yez are a thife sunburnt. Now watch me wance. It's a bit av Donnybrook fair yez will be after feastin' the two eyes av yez on presently," said Barney.

Meantime the burly Dutchman had thrown off his coat, and now he began to spar up to Barney in real fighting style.

"I vos dot Dutch Sullivans. When I vos mit mine home in Milwaukee, Wis., I vos work mit dot brewery, und I vos de poss mans py dot gangs," said the Dutcher.

"Begob an' it's mesel' as will take some av the conceit out av yez, ye big beer tub, yez! Come on, now. Talk is mighty chape, but it takes good money to buy whisky," retorted Barney.

Then the ruction commenced.

The Dutchman led, and caught Barney on the ear.

That made the Irishman very mad, particularly as the soldiers began to jeer him.

Then Barney went into that Dutcher.

"Take that, Mr. Bismarck!" yelled the Irishman, and he knocked the big fellow clear off his pins and sent him sprawling upon the ground at distance.

Mr. Dutchman didn't come to time.

Slowly he got up, and the rueful expression on his fat countenance was simply ludicrous as he said:

"I vos finish mit dis fight. But I vos fight with you some more dimes, in dot sweet py and py—when I was got cast-iron plated with mine self. I vos a goodt mans. Yaw!"

Good for nothing!" commented Barney.

But just then a soldier threw a huge quid of tobacco, and it struck Barney in the face.

The fact was the soldiers were enraged at the Irishman for defeating their champion, and now they meant to mob him and Pomp.

The word had been passed about from one to another of the blue-coats, and it was understood between them that they were to give the Irishman and the darky a severe drubbing.

But they did not know Barney and Pomp as yet.

If they had been better acquainted with the two old friends, possibly they would have let out the contract to whip them cheaply.

"Who hit me wid the pavin'-stone!" yelled Barney, as he wiped the quid of tobacco off of his face.

"Give it to 'em, fellers!" called out a tall soldier, who had constituted himself a leader among the blue-coats.

Then the soldiers went for Barney and Pomp in real earnest.

And the Irishman and the darky made a grand fight. While Barney picked up a club and wielded it as a shillalah, cracked heads right and left, the darky astonished the blue-coats.

Pomp saw the occasion was one demanding that he should get right down to solid work in the butting line, and "he got there in great shape."

"Biff! bang! smash!" went Pomp's thick skull against his foes like a cannon-ball, and every butt knocked out one of the soldiers.

In less than five minutes the blue-coats who were able to do so fled from before the Irishman and Pomp.

Then the two heroes were called on board the Queen Clipper.

The voyage was about to be resumed.

In a very short time the Queen Clipper was once again sailing the air. The settler and his family had been left with the emigrant train.

Perhaps an hour later a singular incident, and one which was destined to lead the air voyagers into the midst of new and thrilling perils, transpired on board the aeronef.

A beautiful carrier pigeon, winging its flight on tired wings, from the southward, alighted on the deck of the air-ship.

Frank and the doctor were first to see the pigeon, and as they watched it after it had alighted on the deck, they saw a letter secured about its neck.

Frank consulted this atlas.

He had no difficulty in finding the desert of Mapimi.

The course of the Queen Clipper was then immediately changed, and she cruised southward.

A steady run of some little time, which was devoid of special features, ensued.

Finally a barren track of country was sighted in the northern part of the State of Chihuahua, Mex-

The air-ship cruised about for some time.

Frank kept a constant look out with his glass.

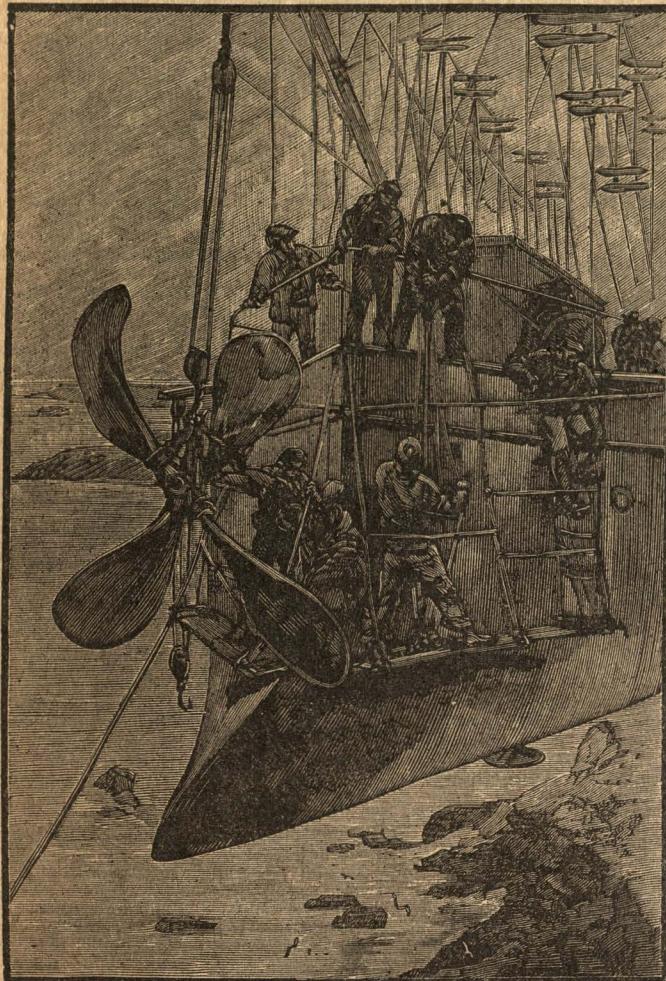
After a considerable time had been consumed far

roundings caused a descent to be made until the air-ship was at but a trifling elevation.

Meanwhile Smith Brown, in the stern cabin, was making certain preparations, the motive for which would not have been comprehended by any of the crew of the aeronef if they had observed him.

The insane professor carefully closed all the windows of the stern cabin and the door. Furthermore he seemed to be intent upon excluding the air that might even penetrate through the key-hole of the door, for he plugged that.

Having done this, the maniac began to dance about the closed cabin in delirious joy and exultation.



He anchored her within about fifty feet of the earth. Swinging scaffolds were rigged about the bow of the Queen Clipper, and the work of repairing the propeller at once begun.

Curiosity prompted Frank, and he approached the carrier.

The pigeon proved to be very tame, and Frank caught it without any difficulty, and then he removed the letter from about its neck.

The missive was a strange one, written in an excellent, manly hand in pencil, on a piece of wrapping paper.

Frank glanced over it, and then he read it aloud to the doctor.

The letter ran as follows:

"DEAR BROTHER.—I am a prisoner at the ranch of the notorious Mexican brigand, Joaquin Murillo, near 'Death Marsh,' north of the Desert of Mapimi, in Chihuahua, Mexico. I send this message by my trained carrier pigeon, that I brought with me from my home. Organize a rescue party and come here at once, if you would save the life of your unhappy brother."

JAMES HUDSON."

"More work for us. Let us again prove ourselves worthy of the title of good geniuses. Let us go to the relief of James Hudson," said the doctor.

"My idea! Let me consult the map of Mexico. We must locate the desert mentioned in the letter, and make sure of our course," replied Frank.

Then he hastened to his cabin.

There was an atlas of the United States, compiled from the most recent government statistics, and the last geographical survey.

away in the distance, riding along the confines of the Mexican desert.

By Frank's orders the Queen Clipper was started in pursuit of the horseman.

The speed of the air-ship so far exceeded that of the swiftest horse that the horseman was soon overtaken. But the Queen Clipper was kept at a high elevation, and the horseman did not discover the sky voyagers.

Frank saw that the stranger was gaudily dressed in the picturesque carb of a Mexican ranero, and something seemed to tell him to further pursue the man.

CHAPTER XLVII.

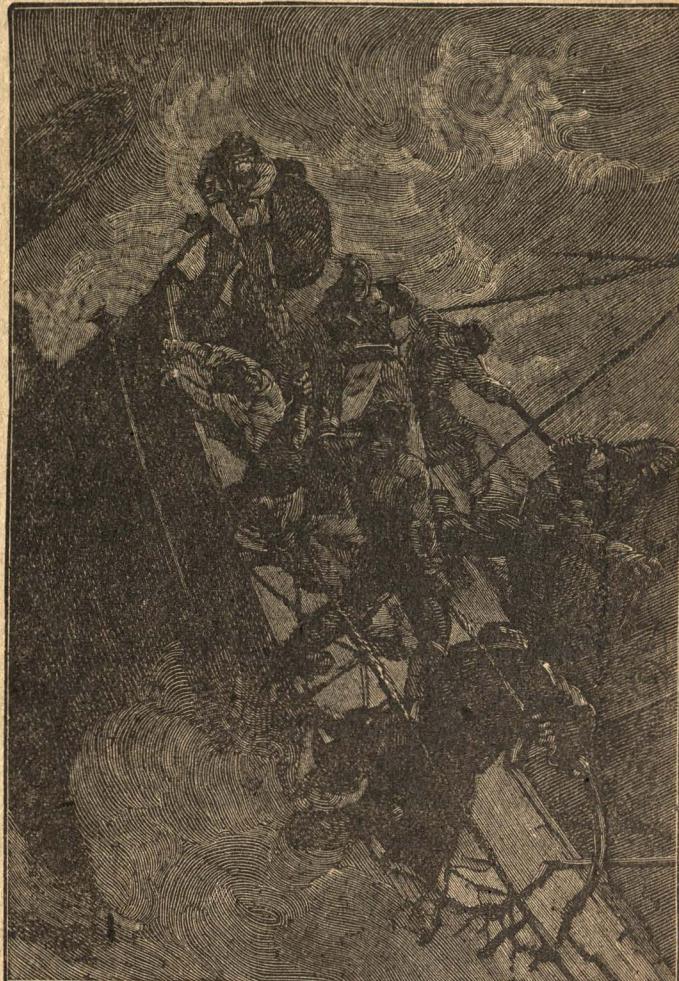
THE MARSH OF DEATH—SMITH BROWN CAPTURES THE AIR-SHIP.

The gaudily-dressed horseman presently disappeared in a mottled cottonwood, half a mile from the point where the actual sandy waste of the Mapimi desert commenced.

The country beyond the cottonwood was seen to be marshy. The inference was that the location of Joaquin Murillo's ranch was pretty nearly reached.

Frank decided to cruise onward.

Accordingly the Queen Clipper advanced slowly, and the necessity for a close inspection of the sur-visible peril, the secret of which was only known



It seemed as though the elements were conspiring against the insane professor now, for when the Queen Clipper was returning to land with the fishermen a great water-spout suddenly darted up from the sea, and the air-ship was caught and almost overturned.

It seemed that Smith Brown was certain now that the air-ship was almost immediately to fall into his power, judging from his mutterings.

"Ah, ha! The fates themselves are with me! The spirits of the air are my friends. They have led Frank Reade here. Here to the terrible 'Marsh of Death,' where I nearly perished when here with an exploring party, eight years ago. Since that time the fatal marsh has undergone no change. It is still the same terrible death-trap as of yore. And Frank Reade is deliberately venturing into it in ignorance of its perils. At last my hour of triumph has come. Let the Queen Clipper go on. On to its doom. I shall not raise my voice to give warning. No word from me shall stay its advance into the midst of the awful, though invisible danger, that now so closely menaces it."

Thus said Smith Brown, muttering his thoughts as was his habit when alone.

He had said that the danger which threatened the crew of the air vessel was invisible, and this must have been quite true, for Frank Reade, Jr., certainly saw nothing to indicate the proximity of danger, and yet he was keeping a sharp lookout constantly, in the hope of discovering the ranch of Joaquin Murillo.

to Smith Brown, by reason of some terrible experience, as indeed the insane man stated.

The doctor all at once called Frank's attention to a singular phenomenon that was taking place at some distance ahead of the aeronef, and in its very course.

Then, through his glass, the young inventor inspected the singular occurrence which the doctor had indicated.

Frank was very much surprised as well as mystified by what he saw.

A flock of birds were flying over the marsh to the northward.

There were perhaps a score of the feathered voyagers in the air when Frank saw them. But even as he looked he saw them falling as if stricken by unseen shafts of death. And in less than a moment every one of the birds had fallen into the swamp.

The doctor had witnessed the same mysterious occurrence in the case of a smaller flock of the same species of birds, which had preceded the last collection over the marsh.

"What do you make of this? I must confess, doctor, it is the most singular phenomenon I have ever witnessed," said Frank, looking very much perplexed.

"It is remarkable. I can only account for the occurrence on the hypothesis that some peculiar exhalation from the swamp has caused the death of the birds," replied the old scientist.

"I think you have hit it. What better evidence can we desire than that which we have just witnessed, that this is really 'the marsh of death,' the place we wished to find."

"Right, Frank, right," assented Dr. Vaneyke.

Meantime the Queen Clipper kept steadily on.

Soon it was passing over the marsh. Frank Reade suddenly experienced a strange pungent odor in the air and a singular sinking sensation at the stomach, and instantly his vision became dim. He tried to speak, but could not articulate. He believed he understood the cause of this strange attack and he saw that the doctor was similarly affected.

Frank started for the central cabin to cause the Queen Clipper to be lifted above the reach of the deadly exhalation from the marsh.

Before he reached the open door of the central cabin Frank fell upon the deck. Everything grew black before his eyes, and he lost his senses.

The doctor also sank down beside the rail unconscious.

The rest of the crew in the cabins and about the deck were also rendered insensible.

In five minutes Smith Brown of all on board the air-vessel, save Hall, who was beyond the reach of the poisoned air, was the only man not completely prostrated.

The insane professor knew the Swamp of Death would soon be passed; then he meant to come out of the closed stern cabin, and before the others regained their senses in the pure air beyond the marsh he meant to make all save Beam and Driggs captives.

Dr. Vaneyke had really hit upon the true explanation of the cause of the death of the birds, and reliable explorers say of "The Marsh of Death."

"It is so called because of its poisonous exhalations of carbonic acid gas, which are so powerful that birds flying over the spot, or men or animals, who stray within its influence, are killed."

As the engineers of the Queen Clipper had not turned off the electricity from the several engines when they were severally overcome at their posts of duty, naturally the aeronef maintained its course, and its rate of speed was not diminished.

As none of the poisoned air could penetrate to the stern cabin, Smith Brown was completely isolated from the noxious gases, and when presently the air-ship was beyond the swamp and the air pure, the maniac rushed forth from his cabin.

He was a picture of maniacal exultation.

"Hurrah!" he yelled. "The air is mine! I'll rule the universe beyond the paltry earth! I'll be king of the sky and captain of the Queen Clipper now! Now to fasten all hands save Beam and Driggs under hatches!"

The madman at once began to drag the insensible men of the crew below deck. First he carried Frank Reade down into the hold, then the doctor, and next Barney. After that the other two men of the crew beside Beam and Driggs were also placed in the hold.

The hold was divided into several compartments by partitions provided with heavy doors. Into one of these compartments the maniac thrust all hands whom he had secured. Then he locked and bolted the heavy door, and they were all his prisoners.

By the time he had carried his captives down into the hold, and secured them, Smith Brown was pretty well tired out, and returning to the deck, he took the steersman's place and sat down to rest.

It seemed that he had some definite plan in mind for the future, for he muttered:

"Now for a long flight through the air over unknown seas, and then the Queen Clipper shall descend upon the barren island where I have decided to leave Frank Reade, the old doctor, and the crew who adhere to the young intruder in the field of science, who is at my mercy at last."

Then the maniac changed the course of the air-ship due west, and sent her forward at frightful speed.

Meantime Beam and Driggs, who had been left on the deck, were gradually recovering from the consequences of breathing the poisoned air.

Finally they were able to get up, and seeing them on their feet Smith Brown hastened to inform them that he had seized the ship.

The two rascals were delighted beyond measure and a conversation ensued, in the course of which the maniac explained just what a terrible fate he meant to inflict on Frank Reade and his friends.

"They shall be marooned! Marooned!" shouted the maniac.

"Good! Let 'em perish on an unknown island! Dead men tell no tales," said Beam.

"That's a good plan," assented Driggs.

And Smith Brown felt that he had succeeded in his great plot at last.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE CRUISE OF THE QUEEN CLIPPER UNDER COMMAND OF SMITH BROWN.

In less than an hour after the insane professor became master of the air vessel it had run hundreds of miles.

The State of California lay under the air-craft, when it encountered a terrific storm. The wind attained a velocity of more than a hundred miles a minute, and the Queen Clipper was carried into the very heart of the great cyclone.

Smith Brown now ran the central engine, and Beam and Driggs managed the fore and aft propelling machinery.

Steersman Hall had come out of the magazine, and he had returned to his old position in the glass wheel house.

The danger was now great.

Suddenly the gale shifted, producing a whirlwind of awful power. Instantly the Queen Clipper spun round and round in the vortex of the maelstrom in the air.

Several of the masts for the suspensory helices were blown down, and all at once there was a crash that told the aeronef had sustained serious injury.

The truth was the storm had carried away one of the great wings of the bow propeller.

Smith Brown had turned on all the electricity from the battery to the suspensory engine, in the hope that, as Frank Reade had done on previous occasions, he might carry the Queen Clipper above the storm.

But it was some moments before the suspensory helices could exert a sufficient power against the whirling current of atmosphere, through which they were compelled to force their way, to draw the aeronef above the storm level.

The desired elevation was attained, however, after a desperate struggle with the warring elements, and the Queen Clipper floated above the storm.

It was then found that not only had one of the wings of the bow propeller been broken, but the main shaft was also cracked, so that it might give way entirely at any time.

Smith Brown decided to make a descent, as soon as the vessel could be propelled beyond the range of the storm that was raging below it.

The air vessel labored along, and the shaft did not further yield until the area of the storm was passed.

Then a descent was made at an isolated village in Southern California, and the aeronef was anchored on the sea-shore. More help was required to repair the bow propeller than Smith Brown had at his command, and so he was lowered to the earth, and going to the village, he engaged a number of the ignorant fishermen that he found there.

These men returned to the air-ship with Smith Brown and he and them were drawn up on the deck. The maniac, being short handed, preferred not to risk descending entirely with the vessel, lest the inhabitants of the village might seize the disabled ship. He anchored her within about fifty feet of the earth.

Swinging scaffolds were rigged about the bow of the Queen Clipper, and the work of repairing the propeller at once began.

As soon as possible a new main-shaft was made to replace the old one, and all the injury the vessel had sustained was repaired in three days.

During this time Frank Reade and comrades had not suffered for food or drink. Smith Brown had caused a small hole to be cut in the deck, over

the heads of his prisoners, and through the opening he had lowered food and water to them.

When the Queen Clipper was again in sailing order Smith Brown offered to give the fishermen whom he had employed a short ride in the air.

They accepted his invitation, and the aeronef was gotten underway and it sailed out over the ocean.

But it seemed as though the elements were conspiring against the insane professor now, for when the Queen Clipper was returning to land with the fishermen a great water-spout suddenly darted up from the sea, and the air-ship was caught and almost overturned.

The fishermen were almost frightened out of their wits, and indeed the air vessel had a narrow escape. But after the water-spout was passed it returned safely to the land.

The excursionists were landed, and then the voyage to the far distant island upon which the maniac meant to leave his prisoners was resumed.

Meantime the emotions of Frank Reade, Jr., and his fellow captives below decks may be imagined.

Their captor had taken the precaution to search each one of them, and when they all finally regained their senses in the hold they found themselves unarmed and without a single implement of any kind wherewith they might make their escape.

The great door resisted all their united efforts to force it open, and they abandoned the attempt to do so.

The occupants of the hold were now Frank, Doctor Vaneyke, Blake, and Barney and Pomp. Five persons all told. Their captors were four in number, Smith Brown, Hall, and Beam and Driggs.

At last Frank Reade knew that Smith Brown was his secret enemy. Soon after the hole was cut in the deck over the heads of the captives the insane professor shouted to Frank through the opening:

"Ha, ha! I have you all safe at last, and I am now captain of the Queen Clipper! You are in my power and you will never see Readestown again!"

It was all in vain that Frank tried to make a treaty. Smith Brown refused all offers to release his captives and surrender the ship, though Frank offered him a fortune to be paid in Readestown.

Equally futile were the young inventor's attempts to learn Smith Brown's future plans. The insane man declined to answer all questions that Frank propounded.

But all the time, even from his confederates, the maniac yet concealed the secret of his identity. None of them as yet suspected that he was a maniac.

And Hall did not as yet know what the madman's plans were regarding the captives. Though he had confided his terrible purpose to Beam and Driggs, Smith Brown—before Hall came from his hiding-place in the magazine—warned the two villains not to let Hall know the truth about the doom he had decided upon for the prisoners.

Smith Brown remembered how Hall had prevented his taking the life of Frank in the hold the night that the young inventor found the pretended ghost there.

Warned by that experience, he did not mean that, if he was so disposed, Hall should do anything to save Frank or his friends now.

In all he did Smith Brown continued to evince that deep cunning which characterizes certain phases of insanity.

The revelation that Smith Brown was his secret foe was a great surprise to Frank Reade and the doctor.

They wondered how the traitor had so completely escaped all suspicion, and they were ready to credit him with all the wonderful power of deception to which he was entitled.

But the calamity that had befallen the young inventor and his friends was so terrible and overwhelming that they could scarcely believe that it was all real, and not some frightful dream from which they must soon awaken.

Frank was not of a disposition to give way to despair easily.

His motto was "While there is life there is hope," and so he tried to cheer up his companions and advised them all, instead of giving way to gloomy reflections, to set their wits to work to try to devise some way to outwit their enemies and get control of the Queen Clipper again.

Barney and Pomp were very cheerful after the first shock of the knowledge of their situation had passed.

From the first it was evident to Frank that his enemies could only be foiled by some stratagem. But what was that ruse to be, became the all-important and, for the time at least, unanswered question.

The young inventor was now convinced that Smith Brown was not what he seemed. Frank

suspected he had joined the air-ship with the set purpose of seizing it and murdering himself.

Dr. Vaneyke was of the same opinion as Frank regarding Smith Brown.

"Where is the arch villain taking us?" asked the doctor, in a voice that betrayed all the anxiety he felt for the future.

But Frank could not reply.

He shuddered, however, as he thought of the possible fate that might be to come to him. Some way a vague presentiment had entered Frank's mind that he and his friends were to be abandoned in some distant land, perhaps among some savage race, who would put them to death cruelly.

The outlook for Frank and his comrades was a terrible one.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CAPTURE OF THE QUEEN CLIPPER—BARNEY HAS AN IDEA.

The captives in the compartments of the hold of the air-ship could only vaguely conjecture what the ultimate purpose of their captor regarding themselves might be.

But they certainly had good reason to anticipate the worst, and reflecting upon the past incidents of the wonderful voyage the young inventor and Dr. Vaneyke were pretty well convinced that Smith Brown would, in the end, attempt to accomplish the murderous purpose in which he had heretofore been so many times foiled.

At length Frank and the doctor determined to hold a final consultation with their comrades in misfortune, and Frank addressed his party, saying:

"Now let each man set his wits to work and seek to devise some expedient—some plan looking to our escape. As yet we have not been able to devise any project that seems to promise well, but further reflection may bring a new idea to some one of our minds. Bear in mind the situation is one of life or death for us all, and let the urgent necessity of our case inspire you. It matters not how desperate any proposition leading to the desired end may be, it shall be tried."

They had all looked the situation in the face now, and all were striving to devise just such an idea as Frank sought to inspire.

All wondered where they were being carried at the will of Smith Brown. They had seen Hall, the steersman, at the opening in the deck over their heads, which the insane professor had caused to be made there, and "the ghost" was no longer a mystery.

They understood, therefore, that the plot of which they had now become the victims had been commenced a long time previously, and Barney and Pomp, as well as Blake, were heartily ashamed of the superstitious fears they had been led to exhibit.

There was silence among Frank Reade's comrades for a long time after he last spoke.

Each one of the imperiled party was striving to obey the behest of their young leader and offer some practical suggestion.

"If we only had any implements to work with, it would not be so difficult to think of a way of escape. But under the conditions present I can give no advice," said Blake, in dejected tones, at last.

"Dat's my fix tu! Gollie! I'se clean done gin up," said Pomp, scratching his head ruefully, while his black face presented a perfect picture of perplexity.

Then the doctor spoke:

"It seems to me the situation offers no chance for us, and that we must patiently bide our time and wait for some change of circumstances," said he.

Frank looked disappointed. He had half hoped that at least some one of his companions might have given him a hint that he could have developed into a project of value.

But Barney had not spoken yet.

Frank turned toward the jolly Irishman and saw him standing in the middle of the room looking up fixedly at the closed opening in the ceiling, which was the deck floor.

"Well, Barney, have you nothing to say? Are we to gain no ideas from your shrewd Irish wits?" Frank asked.

"Begob, an' it's a bit av a scheme that's in me moind at the present toime, sure," replied Barney, still looking at the ceiling as though that was the source whence his inspiration was drawn.

There came a murmur of interest from the little company and all gave Barney their attention immediately.

The person who could suggest a way of escape now was to be listened to with consideration, and Barney's face told that for once at least he was entirely serious.

"Well, Barney, tell us what you have in mind. Don't you see we are all in suspense?" continued Frank.

"Faith, thin, I was after thinkin' av the circus

—av how thim circus mines that bees so slick an' lovely make a pyramid av thimselfes by standin' on each other's shoulders."

"Yes, yes," urged Frank, somewhat impatiently.

"An', begob, if three av us was to make a ladder by standin' on ache other's shoulders, fat's the reason myself could not climb up til the door in the ceiling?"

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Frank, "you deserve the prize for your idea, Burney. It seems to promise something. But the door in the ceiling may be fastened on the upper side."

"Whist a bit, Masther Frank. Sure, an' it's the truth I've been kapin' watch on the thafe o' the worruld whin helet down the food and the wather til us."

"Yes."

"And it's the truth I'm tellin' ye, he opened the door in the ceiling so readily that, begob, it's never toime he had to be after ramovin' any fastenin'. Thin, too, it's listenin' to him I wuz whin he closed it, an' divil a sound av fastenin' did I hear at all."

"Then, Barney, your idea is a grand one. It comes like a reprieve to us. But let me hear all the plan you have devised," cried Frank.

"Sure an' it's plain an' simple loike. I mane at dead ay night that yez make a livin' pyramid up til the door. Thin I'll go up an' open the same. Wance that is done I'll get on deck and creep down the companion-way til the door be which we wuz put in here. Then, I'll be after lettin' av yez all out, in the whisk av a billy-goat's ear. An' thin it's a bit av a ruction I'm countin' on. Arrah! begob! I'll batte the head at the blackguard, Smith Brown," explained Barney.

"Bravo!" cried Frank and the doctor.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Blake.

"Gollie, Irish, whar you done borry de brains dat you used to do' head work?" asked Pomp, regarding Barney with great admiration.

"Look here, nagur! Do ye mane to say that I have no brains av me own?" demanded Barney.

"No, sah."

"Well, what was yez after manin' be that remark, thin, ye Hottentot?"

"Whose er Hottentot? See yere, Irish, dis ain't no place fur a fight."

"Foight, is it? Begob, an' that's all the nagur this av. Don't let the place worry ye. Faith an' Irishman would foight at his own funeral if he wuz to be insulted by a nagur."

"Doan yer crowd on de mourners! I'se got steam ernuff in my biler fo' to butt de side ob de ship out."

"Begob an' yez better turn yer steam until yer brains an' livin' them up, so yez will quit makin' a fool av yerself. Be the shamrock, I like a good, decent igiot, but ye suit me too well."

"Who youse call dat name, sah? Ignor yerself! You're swelled up in de head jess ease yez done thought 'bout de doo' in de ceillin'. Spec's yer head wull git so big wid conceit now dat yer can't git thro' de doo' nohow."

"Begorra, that is too much! Nagur, it's a case av the big head I'll be after givin' av yez wid the two fists av me."

"No, you won't," interposed Frank. "Now, then, we will further discuss the plan for our escape, which you have suggested, Barney."

Pomp turned away grinning, and Barney reluctantly abandoned his proposed ruction with the darky.

Further conversation ensued between the captives of the Queen Clipper.

It was decided that the ensuing night the daring attempt, looking to escape, which the Irishman had suggested should be tried.

The chances of success and failure were fully discussed, and all contingencies were, as far as possible, provided for.

Meanwhile Smith Brown continued to shape the course of the aeronef for the uninhabited island upon which we know he had determined to abandon his captives.

In former years the insane professor had been a great traveler, and he had made long and adventurous voyages in far southern seas.

He had once visited the island he was now making for, and at that time it had no place on the maps. It was one of a South Sea group, distant some miles from the nearest of its companions.

When Smith Brown visited the island it was uninhabited. The insane inventor and scientist had now taken possession of Frank Reade's cabin, and he found great delight in examining the young man's plans and drawings of the Queen Clipper.

Smith Brown sought particularly among Frank's papers to discover the secret of the wonderfully constructed piles of the batteries, which gave forth such electric power as had never before been generated.

But the insane conspirator did not discover the secret, for Frank had committed it to a cipher-writing, to which he alone knew the key. True,

Smith Brown discovered this cipher memorandum, but he was unable to read it.

Toward evening of the day we are writing about, Smith Brown was at the levers in the central cabin alone.

He felt all the exultation of success, and he talked and laughed in a frenzy of maniacal joy. He seemed for the time to have forgotten that his conduct might awaken suspicions of his sanity in the minds of the men who had joined in his seizure of the Queen Clipper.

And one of the men overheard him.

CHAPTER L.

BARNEY MAKES AN ATTEMPT LOOKING TO THE ESCAPE OF THE PRISONERS.

STEERSMAN HALL was passing the door of the central cabin, when he heard the voice of Smith Brown as the maniac was raving in the insane joy which he experienced in the present time of triumph.

Hall paused at once, and at first he thought there must be some one in the cabin with Smith Brown. But as the steersman continued to listen he was convinced that the new captain of the airship was alone there.

The door of the central cabin was closed, and Hall cautiously drew nearer. His curiosity was aroused, and the idea occurred to him that perhaps Smith Brown was intoxicated.

But he had never known Smith Brown to use spirits intemperately, and so he was in doubt as to the truth of his conjecture.

"At all events, it seems to me no man would take on as he does unless he was drunk," thought Hall.

After listening at the door of the central cabin for some moments the steersman moved on.

But he was troubled. He had not been able to make anything of Smith Brown's incoherent ravings. But he reflected that, supposing that Smith Brown had taken to drinking immoderately, he certainly would not be worthy of the command of the air-ship. While intoxicated he might direct the air-ship to destruction.

Not long after that Hall boldly entered the central cabin.

He had resolved to test his suspicion regarding Smith Brown's intoxication.

As he came to the cabin door this time he heard no sound of Smith Brown's voice.

Entering, he found the insane professor seated calmly at the levers with no trace of excitement or intoxication in his manner, and Hall could not detect any fumes of liquor.

The steersman was completely perplexed.

But the fact was the insane professor's fit of maniacal mania had passed off, and now he appeared perfectly sane like any rational man.

Hall made an excuse to account for his coming, and then, after exchanging a few remarks with Smith Brown, he retired.

The steersman was now more troubled than ever, and as he returned to his post he said to himself:

"I'll watch Smith Brown closely after this. I am almost convinced that there is some mystery about him that I do not understand as yet."

Hall reflected long and seriously.

And all at once he exclaimed:

"Can it be possible that Smith Brown is insane?"

The idea fairly startled Hall, and he was confirmed in his already formed resolution to watch the man who had awakened this startling suspicion in his mind.

But Hall did not say anything to Beam or Driggs. The steersman was, at heart, an honest man, and his natural impulses were for good.

Had it not been for his unfortunate revengeful disposition he would not have now been leagued with Frank Reade's enemies.

Somehow, Hall intuitively disliked and distrusted Beam and Driggs. His better judgment warned him against them, and he did not fraternize with them.

Beam and Driggs had noticed that Hall held himself completely aloof from them, and they liked him no better than he did them.

Then, too, they had been warned not to fully confide in Hall by Smith Brown.

Taken all in all the situation on board the Queen Clipper was rather complicated, and it was evident that a very trivial incident might serve to bring about new combinations among the men on board it.

Night came, and before a favorable wind the air-ship was still sailing above the Pacific Ocean.

Smith Brown had given Hall the course for the night, and leaving him to perform the duty of wheelman, as well as that of an assistant engineer, while Beam took a sleep and Driggs ran the bow engine, the insane professor retired for the night to the central cabin.

He could snatch a nap now and then at his post,

for it was all plain sailing over the sea, and he did not require much sleep.

The night wore peacefully on and at about midnight Frank Reade and his fellow captain set about attempting the plan of escape which Barney had hit upon.

Pomp took his place under the door in the ceiling, and Blake mounted upon his shoulders. It was then seen that a third man would not be required for standing on Blake's shoulders. Barney would be raised high enough to reach the door and have space to spare.

Barney was very active, and he climbed to Blake's shoulders without difficulty. Pomp went with no mishap.

shoes before he left the hold, and now, walking in his stocking feet, he did not make a sound.

Meantime it was now a time of the most intense and painful suspense for the comrades Barney had left behind him.

Frank Reade went to the door of the prison-room, and there listened intently for the faintest sound that might tell him Barney had safely descended the companion stairs.

Some moments elapsed.

No sound broke the pervading silence. At last Frank knew that sufficient time had passed for Barney to reach the hold if he had met

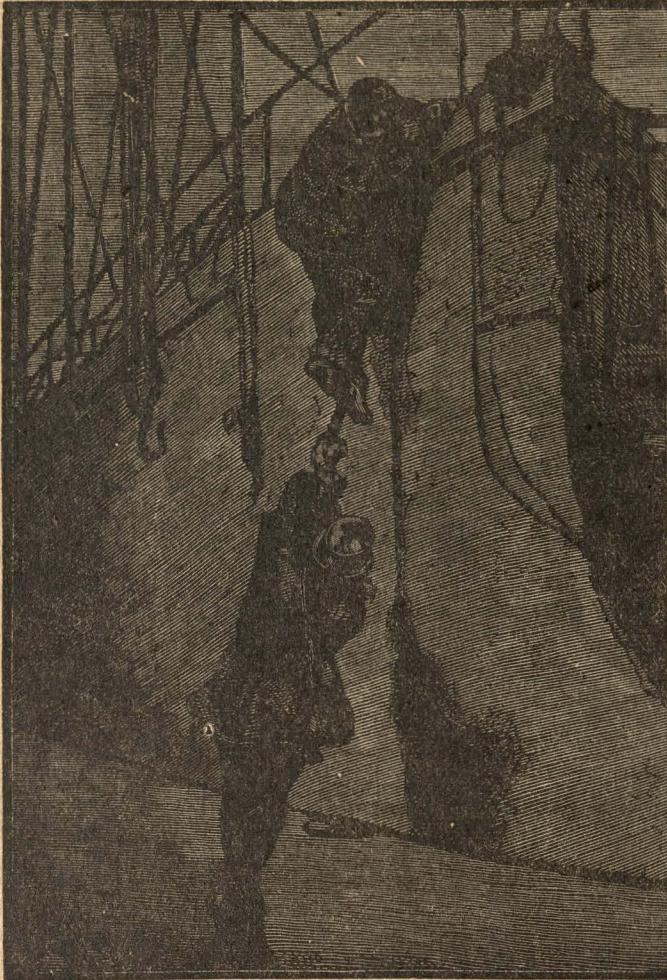
He heard Hall's cautious movement and turned like a flash.

And before Hall could reach him Smith Brown pressed the trigger.

But the weapon failed him. It was not discharged, and the succeeding moment Barney was engaged in a fierce hand to hand struggle with his foes.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, as Smith Brown clubbed his revolver and sprang at him with a furious cry.

The Irishman warded off the blow the insane man aimed at him, and with his clenched fist caught him a blow on the side of the head that



Smith Brown assented, and one after the other the two rascals climbed over the rail and descended to the ground by means of a rope.

know to be a real black giant, and he held his double burden firmly.

Reaching up, the Irishman cautiously seized the door above his head and tried it.

Much to his satisfaction, he found it was not secured on the upper side.

Silently Barney pushed the door, and it slid away from the opening. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the illumination from the outer world at once penetrated to the gloomy prison room of the captives below deck.

Barney listened for a moment, but only the "swish" of the ever restless waves below the ship of air and the "whizz" and "whirr" of the suspensory helices and the propeller came to the Irishman's ears.

Noiselessly he drew himself up through the opening, and the succeeding moment the daring fellow was safely out of the prison below, and crouching on the deck under the moonlight.

His comrades had watched him breathlessly.

A deep breath of temporary relief from suspense escaped Frank as Barney reached the deck, and he whispered to the doctor:

"Thank God he has succeeded thus far."

Barney stealthily replaced the door in the deck-floor as he had found it.

Then he stole forward toward the companion way. He had taken the precaution to remove his

Just then there came a fierce cry from the hold beyond the door of the prison-room, and Frank recognized the voice of Smith Brown.

"Lost! Barney is discovered!" exclaimed Frank, as there followed the sound of a struggle, and other voices were heard.

Frank was right. Barney had been detected just at the moment when the brave Irishman began to think his success was certain.

He had passed to the companion-way.

As he began to descend the stairs Smith Brown merely by accident, for he had heard no sound, chanced to come to the door of the central cabin.

And he saw Barney as he was disappearing down the stairs. Instantly Smith Brown glided to the fore and aft cabin, and told their occupants to follow him. They did so, and drawing a revolver and enjoining silence, the insane professor stole after Barney.

The Irishman was in the hold, and approaching the door of the prison room. Close behind him then came Smith Brown. Suddenly he leveled his revolver at the back of Barney.

In the rear of Smith Brown were the others.

Hall saw that Smith Brown meant to shoot Barney without a word of warning. He sprang at the insane professor, for he did not mean that murder should be done.

It was a moment of terrible peril for Barney.

dropped him as though he had been stricken by a sledge hammer.

Then the other three of his enemies closed in on Barney, and his desire for a ruction was for once, at least, more than satisfied.

CHAPTER LI.

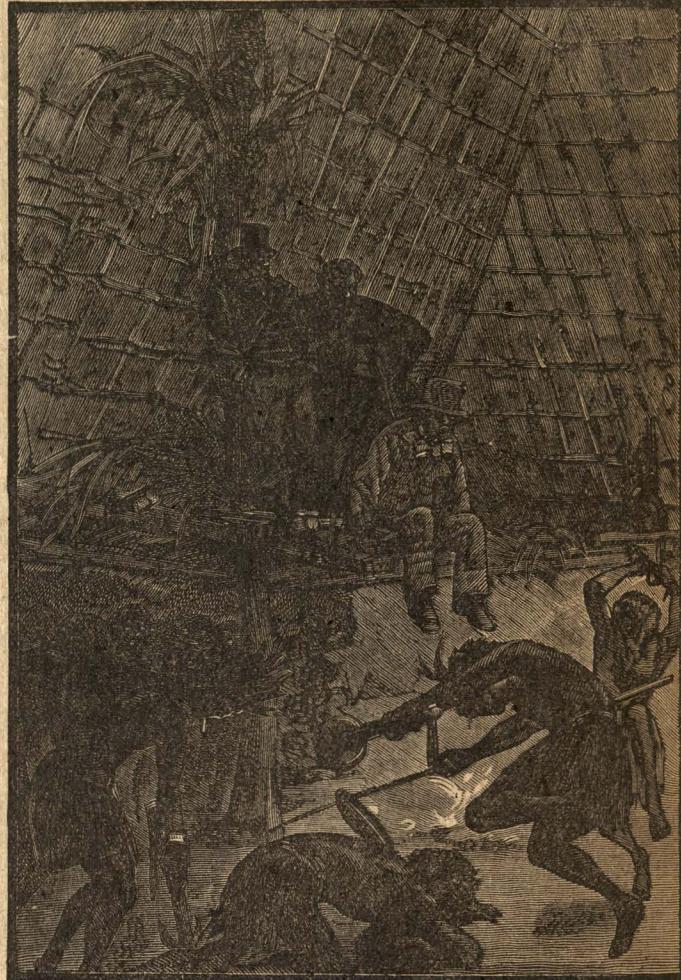
THE ISLAND IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC—BARNEY TRIES A STRATEGEM.

Of course Barney made a great fight, and although the odds were still three to one against him, after the insane professor was knocked out, the Irishman might have come off victorious, but Beam managed to get behind him and deal him a terrible blow on the head.

Barney was brought to his knees, and a second heavy blow from Beam's clubbed pistol so far stunned the brave fellow that his assailants were enabled to overpower him and bind him hand and foot.

Frank Reade and his comrades had listened to the sounds of conflict with feelings such as may be readily imagined.

And when they knew from the remarks of the enemy and the silence of Barney that the devoted fellow had been defeated they were indeed ready to despair.



It seemed that their last hope was gone now. In silence they stood together in their dark prison for some moments.

At last a bitter groan escaped Frank's lips, and he said:

"It seems we may now as well resign ourselves to the inevitable. Fate is against us. We are not to escape."

"I am not a fatalist, but I cannot gainsay your words, Frank," assented the doctor.

"Goilal! I'se sorry fer Barney, an' I'se only a poor man, but I'd gib all de few good dollars dat I'se sabed up if I could only hab a chance for to go to Barney's help. Fo' de lamb, I 'spec's dat dar would hab been some buttin' done den," said Pomp, regretfully.

Meantime Barney was carried into one of the cabins.

There he became insensible, and Smith Brown, who had soon recovered from the Irishman's blow, ordered him to be unbound.

This was done.

Then the Irishman was left alone by his captors, who secured the stout door of the cabin on the outside, and so made Barney a prisoner.

When he came to his senses his first feelings were those of chagrin and disappointment. But his volatile spirit could not long be depressed by any calamity, and instead of bemoaning what could not now be helped, he muttered:

"Be the harp av Tara, now, it's more determined I am than iver to get the best av the blackguards av the worruld. Bad scran till the loikes av them."

Then, so to say, Barney put on his thinking-cap, and cudgeled his brains as he had never done before in all his life to think of some plan to outwit the enemy, even yet.

Day dawned again, and the ship of the air sailed steadily on.

At sunrise the insane professor took an observation, and after making a calculation by means of Frank Reade's nautical implements and marine charts, he ordered the course changed a few points.

The weather still held fine.

Smith Brown seemed now anxious to reach the South Sea island which he was making for as soon as possible.

Possibly he feared some cunning device of the captives might yet result in their gaining their freedom.

The speed of the air-ship was materially increasing, and the voyage was continued without the occurrence of incidents worthy of special record for some time.

At last, just at nightfall, an island was sighted to the southward.

Smith Brown at once announced that it was the land he was in search of, and all speed was made for it.

But night had fully fallen, and the moon, shining through a cloud-flecked sky, illuminated the scene when the Queen Clipper at last made a landing on the island.

Blank, barren and desolate the island seemed.

The water tank on board the Queen Clipper was now empty, and as soon as a landing had been safely made, and the aeronef rested on terra-firma again, Smith Brown proposed a search should be made for fresh water, which they stood greatly in need of, without waiting for another day to dawn.

Under the moonlight it seemed the search might be carried forward very well, and Beam and Driggs volunteered to go in search of a fresh spring.

Smith Brown assented, and one after the other the two rascals climbed over the rail and descended to the ground by means of a rope.

Beam and Driggs were absent for some time, and Smith Brown began to get anxious about them. He spoke to Hall and besought his advice.

Hall thought perhaps the two men had lost their way among the rocks and hills with which the island was completely covered, it seemed to him.

As yet the electric light had not been shown since the Queen Clipper landed on the island.

Now Hall proposed that the light be displayed as a beacon, that, seeing it, the men who were absent might locate the position of the air-ship, in case they had lost their bearings.

To this Smith Brown agreed, and the electric light was accordingly turned on in all its brilliancy.

The white, penetrating light could be seen for a long distance, and Hall and Smith Brown hoped it would guide Beam and Driggs, if they were in need of such assistance.

But the hours passed and still the absentees did not reappear.

Little did the insane inventor or Hall suspect what had really befallen Beam and Driggs.

Smith Brown believed the seemingly barren island to be uninhabited.

But this was not so, nor was the island entirely barren throughout its whole extent. In the inter-

ior there was a large, beautiful valley, where the soil was most fertile and vegetation was luxuriant. There tropical fruits and flowers abounded, and the valley was inhabited by a tribe of South Sea savages.

Among the rocky hills that shut in the charming valley the men in search of water lost their way. Then they wandered on and on, rendered almost despairing by the thought that they were lost in that unknown land.

But finally they entered the fertile valley, and they were almost immediately discovered by a band of half naked natives.

It seemed that Beam and Driggs were the first white men the islanders had ever seen. They treated the two rascals with great respect, and led them to a rude temple.

Upon being ushered into the strange structure, what was their surprise to see, seated upon an elevated platform, where a small, hideous idol stood against the wall, a real American darky, wearing a high silk hat, an enormous bow necktie and a plaid suit of bright colors.

Beam and Driggs were placed upon the platform, and as they stood against a center pole, watching the natives in astonishment, while they prostrated themselves before them as if in worship, the darky sat on the edge of the platform with his legs hanging over, and seemed to take it all as a matter of course.

Presently the darky whispered:

"Dem niggers hab set me up for an idol fo' some weeks. Since Ise shipwrecked yere a big trunk comed ashore an' I got dese yere slick togs outen it."

So the mystery of the strange darky's presence there was explained.

Meantime, while the insane professor and Hall waited for the return of Beam and Driggs, Barney had another brilliant idea.

All at once Smith Brown and Hall were alarmed by hearing a terrible groaning.

It sounded as if some one below deck was in mortal agony.

Smith Brown and Hall ran to the companion-way.

In a moment they had located the place whence came the agonized groans. The sounds emanated from the cabin in which Barney was confined.

The insane inventor went to the door of the cabin and Hall followed him. Smith Brown called out:

"Silence in there! What are you making all that noise for?"

There was no reply, but Barney groaned harder than ever.

"Very well, make all the noise you like," finally cried Smith Brown, in angry tones, and then he and Hall returned to the deck.

But for a long time Barney's groaning continued, and it gradually became fainter, and Hall thought something serious might be the matter with the Irishman.

"Perhaps Barney was injured fatally by the blows Beam dealt him on the head. I should like to go down and do what I can for him. He may be dying all alone in the cabin," said Hall, at length.

"No. Remain where you are. Let him die if he will. Then we shall have no more trouble on his account," said Smith Brown, brutally.

And so Hall did not go to look to Barney and at last his groaning ceased. Barney was trying a stratagem. Would it succeed?

CHAPTER LII.

THE ESCAPE OF BEAM AND DRIGGS—PURSUED BY THE SAVAGE ISLANDERS.

THE night passed slowly to Hall and Smith Brown. As the hours elapsed and Beam and Driggs did not return, their anxiety became more and more intense.

But dawn came again, and yet Beam and Driggs remained absent.

The insane professor, soon after daylight came, proposed to Hall that he should go in quest of Beam and his companion.

To this Hall assented, and having armed himself with a rifle and revolvers, he set out to explore the island.

Smith Brown was thus left alone with the captives on board the Queen Clipper.

Hall had observed the direction taken by the two missing men when they left the air-ship the preceding evening, and he directed his steps in the same course.

Very soon he passed out of sight of the aeronef among the adjacent range of rocky hills into which Beam and Driggs had previously wandered, during their search for fresh water.

Smith Brown watched Hall until he was out of sight. Then the insane professor seated himself on the deck and mused upon the situation.

He was in a quiet mood, and he gloated over his success.

"So Leonidas Wickersham is at last master of the great ship of the air. He has attained his object. It only remains to land the prisoners, and then I shall sail away to begin a career that shall astonish the world. It is my dream ultimately to establish a kingdom of my own, in some sunny southern island, where fruit and flowers make the land seem a paradise. There I shall bring men and women, whom I shall capture by means of the air-ship. They shall become my subjects. I shall be a king when I am on the earth, at my sea-girt realm, as well as when I am sailing the air. Ha! man never conceived such a glorious future as Leonidas Wickersham has mapped out for himself. And it shall be realized. All! All! The way to its attainment is clear, since I have finally triumphed over Frank Reade, Jr."

His strange, wild fancy was to him a serious matter. His diseased brain made it all seem real and probable. He had no thought or fear of defeat now.

Presently the insane professor arose and began to pace the deck.

He had already discovered that Hall was not likely to fall in with any project that smacked of inhumanity toward his prisoners, and he was thinking of the steersman then.

"I will have no one with me who is likely to set his will against my own. Hall is too chicken-hearted to win my entire approval. He may object to my plan to maroon the captives here," muttered the maniac.

He continued to make the transit of the deck with rapid, nervous strides for some moments. But finally he paused and spoke again to himself in decisive tones:

"I'll brook no interference. If Hall sets himself against me in this matter. If he dares to attempt to prevent my deserting the prisoners here I'll leave him on the island too. Perhaps I had best do so in any event, for I have a premonition there will ultimately be a rupture between that man and myself. As for Beam and Driggs I am satisfied they have no scruples that will militate against my plans in any way," he said.

Meantime Beam and Driggs were having an experience that was by no means pleasant.

After the giant savages who had placed the two rascals, in company with the shipwrecked darky, on the altar in their strange temple, worshiped the white men for some time, the former retired, and Beam and Driggs were left alone with the darky.

"I've got enough of this, by gosh! an' the sooner we kin git out and give the nigger the clean slip, the better it will suit me," said Beam.

"Right you are. But the question that's agitating my mind is whether we will be let go. I'm afearde we are prisoners," replied Driggs.

"Dat's so, I 'specs, fo' a fact," said the shipwrecked African.

"Why so?" asked Beam.

"Fo' case I tried it, an' got stopped. Yer see, I tried to get away from 'em, but they collared me an' foched me back."

"Well, I mean to get away from them, if Yankee cunnin' is worth anything, all the same," responded Beam.

"How shall we make the attempt?" asked Driggs.

"We'll wait until the village becomes quiet. Then we'll crawl out of this and try to get away to the hills. Once there we'll ascend to the highest p'int o' land we kin find, an' the chances are we'll locate the air-ship. Old Smith Brown will be likely to show the electric light as a guide for us."

"That's so. He'll begin to think we are lost," Driggs remarked.

"Will you white gemmen allow me to go wid yer?" asked the shipwrecked darky.

"Certainly. We hain't goin' back on an American citizen 'cause he's tanned. You're as welcome as the flowers in May. Come with us ter the air-ship—if you can get there," replied Beam.

An hour later the trio crept to the door of the island temple.

Beam peered without; but he hastily drew back and whispered to his comrades:

"There are four big savages, armed with spears, at the door, standing guard. We can't get by them."

"Let's cut a hole in the rear wall," suggested Driggs.

"Good enough. We'll try it," assented Beam. They set to work, and using their pocket-knives, in half an hour they had made an opening in the wooden wall of the temple large enough to admit of the passage of a man. Through this Beam crawled. He saw none of the savages on that side of the temple, and so informed his companions in a whisper.

Then they crept after the leader, and once outside of the temple, they began to creep away toward the confines of the village.

Already the night was well advanced, and soon the new day would dawn.

Fortune seemed to favor the escaping ones. Unseen they reached the hills beyond the village in the valley.

"So far so good," said Beam, as they stood together behind the first ridge of the hills they had reached.

"Now for yonder peaks," he added, indicating the most lofty elevation of the range, which appeared to be at no great distance.

Beam led the way toward the mountain, and his two companions followed him.

It was not long, however, before they discovered that the mountain was much more distant than they had supposed. But the necessity for using

shipwrecked darky. Then ensued a long race, and day dawned completely.

They were all running at full speed, and they had just rounded an abrupt curve in the defile which they were threading, when they beheld a white man before them.

"Hall!" shouted Beam in delight, as he recognized the steersman, who had come in search of him and Driggs.

"The savage islanders are after us! We have escaped from them after being captured!" said Beam as he reached Hall.

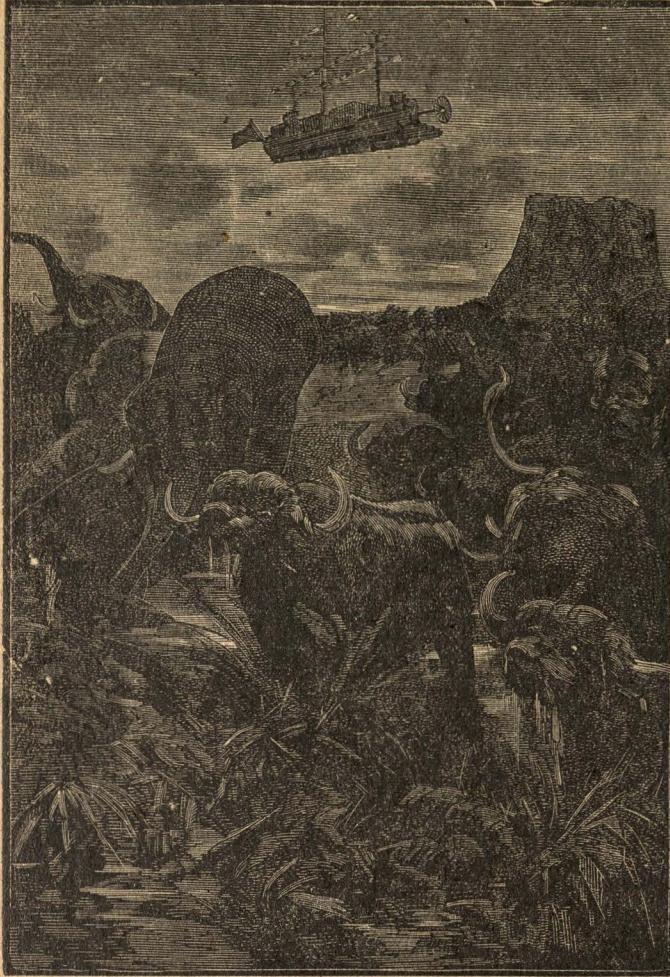
"Here they come!" cried Hall.

Indeed the islanders seemed to be terribly enraged at the death of the warriors who had fallen under Beam's bullets. They appeared to be intent on vengeance.

The safety of the air-ship was really endangered.

The temporary halt of the savages enabled the fugitives to gain a start, and they held their own in the race, and finally reached the air-ship ahead of the savages.

Smith Brown saw them before they reached the aeronef, and before they boarded the vessel the maniac had thrown open the arms room and got the cannon trained on their pursuers.



One night land was sighted. The men on deck saw elephants and wild cattle, and they believed the land was a portion of Africa.

the summit for an observatory urged them on, and a long and tiresome march finally brought them to the mountain top.

They were rewarded for the efforts they had made to reach it, for no sooner had they climbed to the apex of the great cone than they saw a brilliant white light gleaming afar like a bright star of hope.

They knew it was the electric light on board the Queen Clipper, and they set out for it. But when they were at the foot of the lofty mountain and among the rugged hills again they could no longer discern the light which was to be their guiding star.

But they thought they could reach the right course, for each one of the two had noted the point of the compass whence the electric light came.

They went forward at once, but the way was rugged, and they were compelled to turn and twist through tortuous defiles and among rocky passes. So it was not to be wondered at that they strayed from the direct course they desired to maintain.

The first gray light of dawn had come into the eastern horizon when to the ears of the escaping trio came a sound that caused them intense alarm.

It was the yells of the giant islanders. Then they knew that their escape had been discovered, and that the savages were on their track.

Beam immediately broke into a run.

His example was followed by Driggs and the

At that moment the savage islanders came in sight around the curve.

Beam snatched Hall's rifle from the steersman excitedly, and the next instant he opened fire upon the savages with the repeating weapon.

Several of the savages fell, and the advance of the others was momentarily checked.

"I can guide you to the air-ship! Forward for your lives!" cried Hall.

The succeeding moment the fugitives were in full flight again.

CHAPTER LIII.

A BATTLE WITH SAVAGES—THE MUTINEERS ARE COMPELLED TO CALL ON FRANK READE.

But the savage islanders did not abandon the pursuit. In a few moments they came on again at full speed.

The band of islanders numbered about a hundred dusky warriors. As they advanced they made the island ring with their loud, fierce yells.

The savage arms consisted of spears, war clubs, and bows and arrows. They were a formidable force, and Hall said to his companions, as he led them in the race for life:

"They will attack the air-ship. We shall have to get the Queen Clipper afloat in the air again immediately, and leave the island."

As soon as the panting fugitives gained the deck of the air-ship Smith Brown shouted:

"We must get under way instantly! Man the fore and aft propelling engines! I'll give the savages a volley, and then reach the suspensory engines and send the Queen Clipper up beyond the reach of the enemy!"

Beam and Driggs rushed to the fore and aft engines.

Hall sprang to Smith Brown's assistance and helped him get the cannon more accurately trained on the approaching savages.

The rescued darky stood by with his mouth agape and his eyes bulging out with astonishment. He had made many a sea voyage, but he had never seen such a strange looking craft as he was now on board of.

A moment and Smith Brown cried:

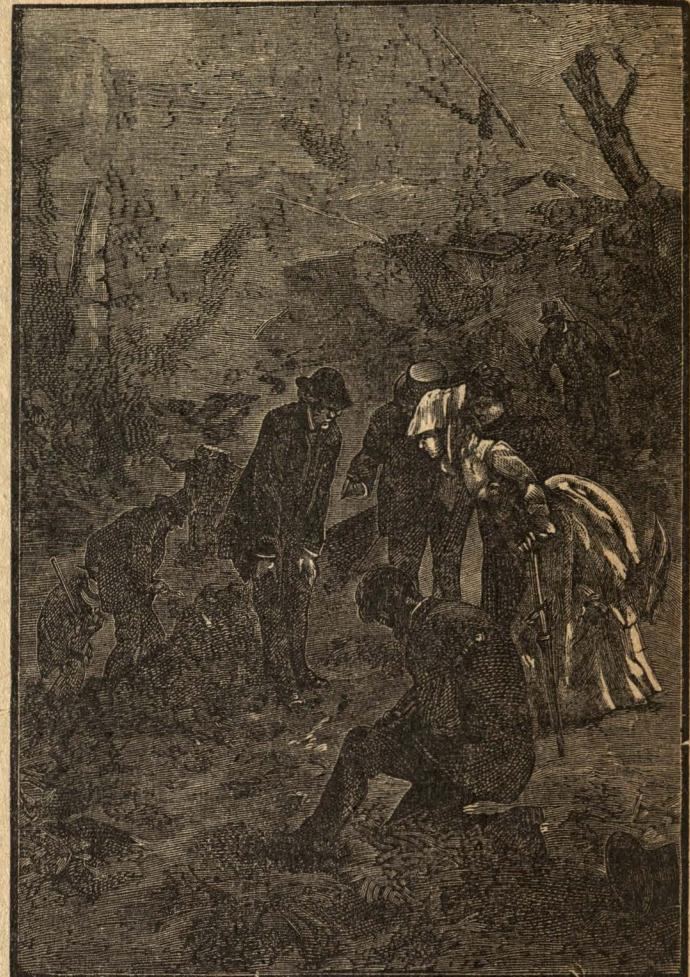
"Now I've got the savages covered! The cannon is loaded with grape-shot, and I'll wager it stops the band at the first volley!"

As the last word passed the lips of the insane professor he discharged the cannon.

The report boomed out over the island, waking the echoes of the isolated sea-girt land as they had never been awakened since the world began.

The natives had never heard anything resembling that report except the detonation of the thunder during some terrible tropical storm.

And the result of the discharge appalled them.



A dozen of the savages were slain, and they were halted.

Then Smith Brown made a rush for the suspensory engine.

The safety of the Queen Clipper was now the first consideration in the mind of the insane professor.

He seized the levers of the suspensory engine as soon as he entered the central cabin, and depressed them in the way necessary to turn on the electricity from the giant piles and wonderful accumulators of Frank Reade's invention.

But there was no responsive result.

The engine did not move.

The suspensory helices did not stir.

Smith Brown was simply amazed. He stood for a moment dumfounded. Then, as all the machinery was intact, and he knew there was no fault with the engines, he exclaimed:

"Ha! I understand. The electric piles, the secret of which is known only to Frank Reade, Jr., have given out. The chemicals require to be renewed at certain intervals."

Smith Brown had hit upon the correct explanation of the failure of the motive power of the airship.

And the insane professor had been baffled in all attempts to learn the composition of the giant electric piles.

He comprehended on the instant that the Queen Clipper was lost unless he could hold it against the attack of the savage islanders.

At that moment their yells rang fiercely in his ears again, and he knew they were coming on again at a charge.

Smith Brown rushed out of the central cabin, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"The electricity has failed! To arms! We must beat off the savages with our firearms!"

Then he sprang to the cannon and began reloading the great gun in all haste.

The others rushed from their respective stations, and immediately seized their arms.

The rifles in the rack of the arms-room were all loaded, and they were repeaters of the best make.

Ranging themselves along the railing, against which they hastily heaped provision boxes, which chanced to be on deck, the defenders of the Queen Clipper crouched behind the improvised breast-work and opened fire upon the savages.

The islanders were furious, and the prospect of plunder, which the capture of the air-ship suggested to their minds, was also an incentive to them.

Led on by a couple of hideously tattooed chiefs of huge proportions, even among the tall race of men they captained, the islanders charged right in the face of the volley of lead from the Queen Clipper.

But as the crash of musketry, and the yells of the islanders and shouts of the crew of the air-vessel mingled in a terrible din of strife, and the enemy reached very near the ship, Smith Brown depressed the cannon accurately, and discharged it.

The effect was awful. The torrent of small shot vomited forth by the engine of destruction mowed down the savage islanders like grain before the reaper's stroke.

The savages were massed compactly, so that the exertion of the grape-shot was rendered most complete. Scarcely a missile from the cannon missed its billet.

The ground beside the air-ship was strewn with the dead and dying savages. Even their reckless charge was checked and they beat a retreat.

At a fearful cost they had been taught a lesson which they would never forget. But, though they fell back, and did not come within rifle range again then, Smith Brown knew that they would make an attack again under the cover of darkness if the Queen Clipper was on the island when night again fell.

Now the crew of the Queen Clipper had a breathing spell.

Smith Brown called a consultation.

"Men," said he, "There is only one man living who knows the secret of the wonderful electric piles and accumulators—that man is Frank Reade, Jr. Unless the piles are renewed we can never get the ship afloat in the air again. What do you suggest?"

No one spoke.

For a moment Smith Brown waited to hear some suggestion.

But it did not come, and finally he said:

"There is but one thing to do. Frank Reade must renew the chemicals in the batteries, reconstruct the piles, and fill the accumulators with his wonderfully powerful currents!"

"Do you mean to release him?" demanded Beam, in tones of apprehension.

"No," replied Smith Brown.

"What then?"

"I mean to transfer him from one prison to another. I'll put him in the battery-room, and lock

him up there. He shall be given the alternative either to reproduce the powerful currents he alone is master of or die."

"Good!" exclaimed Hall.

"Bravo!" cried Beam.

"Now to open the door in the deck and get Reade out. Prepare a noosed rope, Beam," said Smith Brown.

The door in the deck floor was opened at once, and Smith Brown shouted down the opening:

"Frank Reade, I am about to lower a rope to you. You will slip the noose under your arms and allow yourself to be drawn up. We need your services to get the ship under way. I pledge you no harm is intended you if you do as I say."

Frank Reade heard this with feelings that were by no means those of astonishment.

He had expected something of the kind, for he was aware that the secret combination of chemicals he had invented must soon be renewed, or the Queen Clipper would lose her motive power.

Frank understood now that what he had anticipated had occurred.

He whispered to Dr. Vaneyke, and told his old friend that he would go on deck, and trust to chance to outwit his enemies yet.

A moment later the noosed rope was lowered. Frank adjusted it under his arms, and he was drawn up. Reaching the deck, he was seized and marched down into the battery room.

"The electricity of the accumulators is exhausted. I'll give you one hour to renew the giant piles and provide the motive power on the airship. At the end of that time, if you have not accomplished what I desire, I'll return and blow your brains out!" hissed Smith Brown, as Frank was thrust into the battery room.

Smith Brown retreated after locking the door, and Frank was a prisoner—alone in the battery apartment.

CHAPTER LIV.

BARNEY'S RUSE—ANOTHER FAILURE—HALL'S GREAT DISCOVERY.

HALL, the steersman, had not forgotten Barney or his apprehensions on the Irishman's account.

After Frank was imprisoned in the battery-room Hall said to Smith Brown:

"I think we had better look to the Irishman. I haven't heard a sound from the cabin in which we locked him up to-day."

"Neither have I. We will go down and see how it is with the fellow. For my part I hope the blow he received in the head may have done for him. He is the most dangerous one of Reade's men except possibly the nigger," said Smith Brown.

"From his terrible groaning last night you know I thought it likely he was dying," continued Hall.

"Yes, and you remember that's just why I did not permit you to go to him," replied the other.

Then he led the way to the cabin in which Barney had been left a prisoner.

Hall followed Smith Brown.

Reaching the door of Barney's cabin, they halted and listened for a moment.

Not a sound from within reached them.

"Hello!" called Smith Brown.

Still there was no answer.

"He may be up to some trick, so I'll be ready to give him a shot, if necessary," said Smith Brown.

Then he drew a revolver, and unlocked the cabin door.

As soon as he had opened it, he saw Barney lying face down on a bunk.

The form did not stir as the insane conspirator and Hall entered.

They went to the bunk, and turned Barney on his back. His body was rigid, and his eyes were closed. He seemed to have ceased to breathe.

"Dead!" said Hall.

"Dead, sure enough," assented Smith Brown. "So much the better. We'll drop the body into the sea when the ship gets in motion again, and sail the air above the waves," he added.

"Yes," assented Hall. "But I'm sorry for Barney. He was a brave, true-hearted, honest fellow."

"But on Frank Reade's side, and so he was my enemy," replied Smith Brown.

Just then Brown's voice was heard from the deck.

"Captain Smith Brown! Captain Brown! The savages seem to be gettin' ready for another charge!" the Yankee shouted.

"To the deck!" cried the insane professor, and he rushed from the cabin.

Hall came at his heels, and they did not lock the cabin door, having no fear of a dead man.

Reaching the deck, Smith Brown saw that some of the savages had advanced a little nearer the air-ship.

But they were still out of rifle range, and Beam had given a false alarm, for they did not come within reach of a bullet.

Soon after Smith Brown and Hall left Barney's cabin a surprising occurrence transpired therein.

Barney opened his eyes and sat upon his couch. There was a comical look on his face as he said to himself:

"Begob an' it's worth tin dead men I am. Faith an' I've outwitted the bloody blackguards av the worruld, an' again I've a chance to save Masther Frank, and the rest av me friends. Sure an' I set in to groan, like I was houldin' av me own wake last night, hopin' to fool the thaves av the world, just as I have done. Bad cess to them!"

Silently Barney arose and went across the cabin.

Reaching the door he listened. But as he heard no one near he advanced through the door, and at once directed his steps for the compartment in which he had left Frank and the others imprisoned.

Of course Barney had no knowledge of the fact that Frank was now in the battery-room.

But fate was against the heroic Irishman again. He had already reached the door of the prison-room, which he meant to open, when he met Beam and Driggs.

The succeeding moment Barney was engaged in a desperate struggle with them.

Beam shouted for help and Driggs lustily seconded his outcry.

Smith Brown and Hall came rushing from the deck, followed by the shipwrecked negro.

The insane professor was astonished at the sight of Barney, and of course Hall shared his amazement.

But they sprang to the assistance of Beam and Driggs, and in a few moments Barney was again overpowered by the odds brought against him.

Then he was dragged back to the cabin from which he had escaped, and again made a prisoner there.

Poor Barney now felt that his last chance was lost, and could no longer hope that he might succeed in saving his friends.

Meantime, Frank Reade had set to work at the batteries.

He resolved to get the piles renewed and re-supply the accumulators with the wonderful currents that were the motive power of the Queen Clipper.

The young inventor, when he was brought on the deck, saw that the air-ship was on an island, and he had no wish to remain in that unknown land.

As he worked at the secret piles among his chemicals Frank's mind was busy.

He was diligently striving for some plan whereby he might baffle his enemies and regain possession of the Queen Clipper.

But it was no easy task, he found, to hit upon a plan that seemed likely to prove successful.

At this time Smith Brown was reflecting somewhat as follows:

"I must now keep Frank Reade a prisoner until I have learned the secret of compiling the mighty electric piles. Ha! I came near overlooking what has occurred. For the time, when I decided to abandon Frank Reade on the island, I did not consider that the electric piles would require renewing."

When the time Smith Brown had given Frank in which to supply the needed electric currents had elapsed, the insane inventor tried the suspensory helices.

To his gratification he found that motion was imparted to the engine, as usual, when he depressed the lever, and immediately the suspensory helices began to revolve.

He shouted his orders, and Beam and Hall manned the fore and aft engines, and in a few moments the wonderful ship of the air soared aloft, and floated majestically away, while the astonished islanders watched it in amazement, and sent up a chorus of disappointed yells, as they understood the white men, whom they wished to slay, were getting safely beyond their reach.

Frank had reconstructed the chemical composition of the electric piles, and now the vessel was good for a long voyage.

Defeated in his plan to leave Frank Reade and his friends on the island, Smith Brown seemed not to have decided again just what he would do with them.

A long voyage ensued over the ocean.

But one night land was sighted. The men on deck saw elephants and wild cattle, and they believed the land was a portion of Africa.

But this region was soon left behind.

Later, as the Queen Clipper ran at great speed over the sea again on a new course, land was again sighted, and presently the air vessel was sailing over it.

Smith Brown soon announced that they were back over United States territory again, and that the land under the vessel was the State of New York. The vessel was brought near the earth, and in passing over a grove a picnic party was discovered.

Smith Brown, in a spirit of wanton deviltry, hurls

ed an iron bar down among the pleasure party. Fortunately it hit no one, and the air-ship sailed away, concealed by the tree tops.

But the picnickers looked in consternation at the iron which had almost buried itself in the earth and sought to determine whence it had come.

The vessel sailed onward for hours, and night again came on.

The situation on board the Queen Clipper remained unchanged. Still Frank was a prisoner in the battery-room. Yet Barney was a captive in the cabin, where Smith Brown had for the second time locked him up.

CHAPTER LV. THE REFLECTIONS OF STEERSMAN HALL—FRANK READE SET FREE.

STEERSMAN HALL was completely thunderstruck at the amazing discovery he had at last made of the identity of Smith Brown with Professor Leonidas Wickersham, the insane scientist and escaped lunatic.

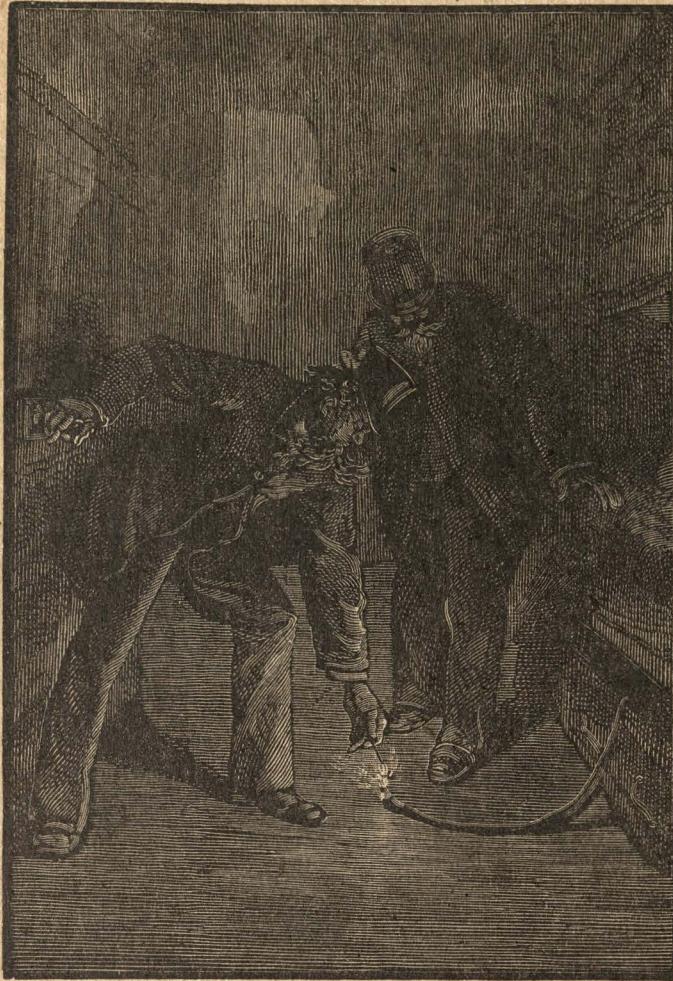
The photograph which he had discovered was an excellent likeness of Smith Brown, and there was not a possibility of doubt about his being the original of it.

It seemed likely to Hall that Beam and Driggs would be as liable as not to adhere to Smith Brown, even if convinced of his insanity, if the maniac held out to them a sufficient incentive in the way of personal interest.

Hall was not very long in arriving at a decision regarding the two mutineers.

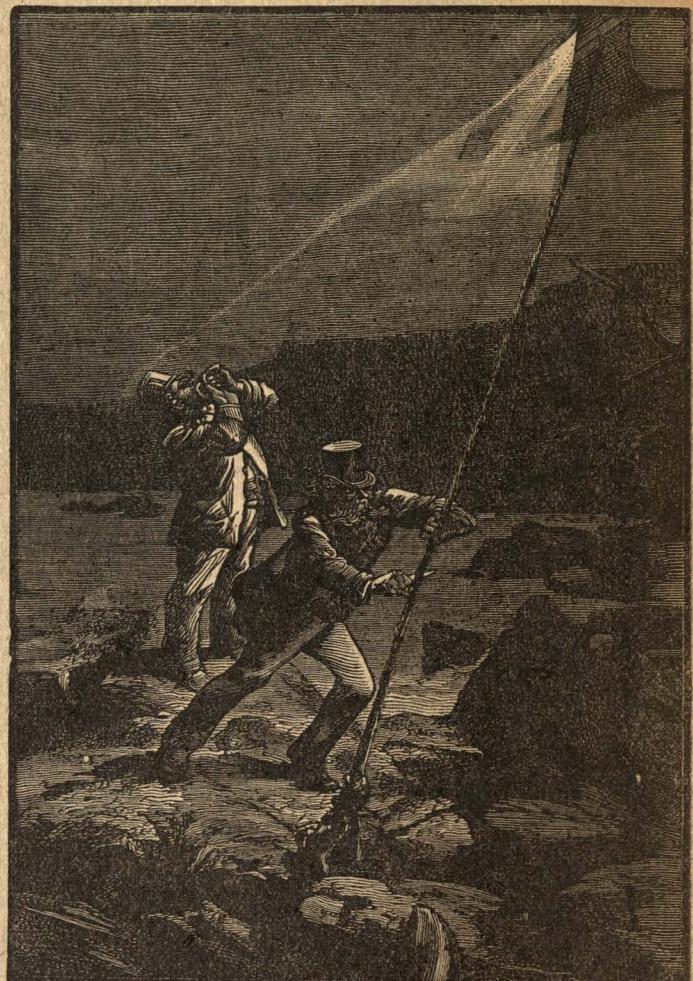
"I will keep my own counsels, as far as regards Smith Brown's identity, from Beam and Driggs," he said mentally.

But Hall felt that something must be done to render the man whom he now knew to be irresponsible for his conduct helpless to do harm.



Between them Beam bored a hole through the partition to the magazine, and Driggs' fuse was thrust through the opening thus made.

Then Beam lighted the fuse.



The electric light had been burning on the Queen Clipper all the evening, and Beam and Driggs were in its brilliant diverging halo when they reached the ground.

"Now to cut the anchor-rope!" said Beam, and he produced a knife he had concealed in his boot and attacked the rope with it.

But that night Hall was destined to make a thrilling discovery.

He was in the bow cabin alone, when his eyes chanced to light on the chest belonging to the two balloonists who had been found dead in the drifting balloon.

We have heard Smith Brown say to himself that the men were his friends.

Prompted by an impulse for which he could not account, Hall opened the dead aeronauts' chest, and examined the large illustrated book on aerostatics which was part of its contents. As he turned the pages, he suddenly came upon a photograph, tightly wedged between the leaves where they were bound together. This photograph had escaped the observation of every one but Hall.

The instant he saw the pictured face he knew it was the photograph of Smith Brown. A second later he read the inscription on the photograph, "From Leonidas Wickersham to his friend Payne."

"Good Heavens! Smith Brown is really Wickersham, the insane professor whom I read about in the paper at Readestown. The present captain of the Queen Clipper is a maniac! We are all at the mercy of a madman!" exclaimed Hall.

But had Hall yet found any positive proof of Smith Brown's real identity being lacking, he would readily have convinced himself now, for, as he recalled many circumstances, the evidence of Smith Brown's insanity seemed to be so plain, that he could only wonder that he had escaped suspicion so long.

The steersman regained his composure, to a degree, after considering the facts as they were now presented.

Of course he could no longer think of obeying orders of the maniac captain of the Queen Clipper, but as Hall well knew how almost supernaturally cunning Smith Brown was, he was convinced that he must proceed with great caution in making any attempt to baffle his insane project.

Hall considered the situation carefully.

A single false move might be fatal to himself.

He remembered Smith Brown's murderous disposition upon several occasions, and he could not help shuddering as he recalled those circumstances.

"Can I trust Beam and Driggs with the secret I have discovered?" Hall asked himself.

He could scarcely answer the question to his own satisfaction. He believed the two men who were now with himself the working crew of the Queen Clipper, were not to be fully trusted, as we have already seen.

It required no stretch of the imagination to conceive that in some wild fit of mania the insane captain of the air-ship might guide the noble vessel to destruction.

The more Hall thought of the affair the more the better part of his nature revolted against the conduct of which he had been guilty in becoming a confederate of Smith Brown.

The steersman thought of Frank Reade and the other members of the crew shut up in the dark compartment under the deck, and at the mercy of a maniac's whims.

While yet Hall felt the injustice of the punishment that Frank Reade had mistakenly caused to be inflicted upon him, still he looked at the matter more justly now that his passions were calmed.

He gave the young inventor credit for acting as the dictates of justice had directed him, and Hall began to think that after all it would be acting the better part to forgive the error Frank had made rather than further cherish revengeful thoughts, and seek to carry them into execution.

Without considerable assistance, Hall did not deem it possible for him to place Smith Brown under restraint, and yet it appeared to him most expedient that the insane professor should be confined, so that he could do no injury to the air-ship, should the mood so to do seize him.

"I believe," reflected Hall, "that Frank Reade

will pardon all that I have done since I became a confederate of Smith Brown's, if I now assist him. I am inclined to do it. My own safety is threatened as well as the safety of the prisoners."

Hall put the photograph of Professor Leonidas Wickersham carefully away in an inside pocket of his reefing jacket.

Then he went out on deck.

There was no one in sight. Just then Smith Brown was in the center cabin, and Beam and Driggs were busy elsewhere.

Hall crept to the companion-way.

Reaching the stairs that led to the hold of the vessel, and the cabin below deck, the steersman descended silently.

He finally determined upon a definite course of proceeding, which he was anxious to carry into execution without further delay.

Hall went directly to the battery-room.

The door was yet secured and Smith Brown had the key.

Frank Reade was just then seated in the battery-room—where he was a prisoner—reflecting deeply, and striving to devise some plan for the discomfiture of his enemies and the recapture of his air-ship.

All at once he heard a voice.

Frank started to his feet and listened.

He heard the voice again. The tones were low, intense and sibilant. He knew at once that some one was cautiously speaking through the keyhole of the door.

Frank's heart leaped hopefully.

The simple fact that the person at the door was employing great caution in seeking to open communication with him was in itself suggestive of assistance.

Crossing to the door Frank said, in a whisper:

"Who is there?"

"Hall," came the answer.

Frank Reade was surprised.

And he also experienced a keen sense of disappointment in the thought that the vindictive steersman could not be a friend.

But as though he understood precisely what was passing in the mind of the young inventor just then, Hall hastened to say:

"You wonder why I am here. You look upon me as an enemy?"

"Yes," admitted Frank.

"That is only natural. I have been an enemy to you, but now I see my folly. I believe you were influenced solely by honest convictions when you placed me under arrest."

"I was certainly. But after what has occurred recently I am almost ready to believe that I cruelly wronged you. Indeed, it seems to me now that Smith Brown was probably the man who robbed chief engineer Sands," said Frank.

"I believe that, and I am willing to let bygones be bygones if you are."

"I am quite ready to do so."

"And you will overlook all I have done against you?"

"Yes."

"Then I have startling news for you."

"What is it?" asked Frank, eagerly.

He conjectured that the steersman might now propose something looking to his own and his faithful comrades' release, but the young inventor was never more surprised than when Hall replied:

"I have discovered that Smith Brown is really Professor Leonidas Wickersham, the insane scientist and inventor, who escaped from the asylum some time before we embarked on this eventful aerial voyage."

The surprising news held Frank speechless for a moment or so.

Then he said:

"Can this indeed be possible?"

"It is true. But listen, and I will tell you how I made the discovery," replied Hall.

Then he went on to tell how he had found the photograph of the insane professor.

"This seems like a providential discovery if it will lead you to set me free," said Frank, when the steersman concluded.

"I will do so. We must regain possession of the ship," Hall rejoined earnestly.

"Then open the door for me, and we will liberate the others and capture Smith Brown and the two mutineers who yet remain at his side," said Frank.

"I have yet to procure the key to this door. Smith Brown carries it."

"You must not attempt to take the key from him. You are my only hope now, and suppose he should detect you! Ah, then the last chance of saving the air-ship would indeed be lost!" Frank exclaimed in alarmed tones.

"Then how shall I get the door open?"

"I will tell you. Go to my cabin. There in a small box on the sideboard you will find a duplicate key of the door, if Smith Brown or some one else has not removed it."

"I'll go at once," replied Hall, and he hastened away.

In a moment or so he was back at the door of the battery room again.

"I have it," cried Hall, in low, exultant tones. Frank heard the key in the lock, and immediately the door opened. The young inventor sprang through it and grasped Hall's hand.

"Free again! Thank Heaven, all is not lost yet!" he said fervently.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE RECAPTURE OF THE QUEEN CLIPPER—FRANK READE, JR., TRIUMPHS.

"Now," continued Frank, "we must not waste a moment. Come to the compartment in which Dr. Vaneyke and my friends are and assist me in opening the door."

"Yes, I am with you," replied Hall.

Then they started forward.

But they had gone but a few paces along the hallway leading to the compartment of the prisons, when they heard a voice.

It emanated from beyond the door of a cabin which they were passing, and these were the words it uttered:

"Begob, an' if I don't git a drink av wather soon, sure an' it's perished I'll be! Worra! worra! Bad luck to the blackguards that left me in here."

"Barney!" said Frank.

"Yes. I almost forgot that he was shut up in the cabin," replied Hall.

"We must release him," said Frank.

"Fortunately I have a key in my pocket that will open the door," answered Hall.

Then Frank stepped close to the door and said: "Barney, I'm going to set you free. Don't make any noise. We are working secretly to outwit Smith Brown and recapture the Queen Clipper."

"Arrah! it's Masther Frank's voice, so it is. An' ye are out av the power av the blackguard av the world! Faith, an' I never was so happy before in all me loife since me Uncle Mike kicked me out av doors to give me a start in life," said Barney, in a half whisper.

Then the cabin door was opened.

And Barney came out.

The impulsive Irishman seized Frank by both hands and danced about in glee.

But, mindful of Frank's warning, he made no noise.

The young inventor then hastened to the door of the prison compartment.

But on the way he entered his own private cabin for a moment and secured a bunch of keys and a brace of revolvers.

Upon arriving at the door of the prison quarters Frank placed his mouth to the key-hole and said:

"Dr. Vaneyke!"

"Who speaks?" replied the good doctor.

"Frank Reade, and he is here to set you all free, but you must make no alarm. We want to fall upon Smith Brown and his mutineers suddenly and take them by surprise."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the good doctor.

Then the bolts and bars on the heavy door were removed, and Frank unlocked it and swung it open.

Dr. Vaneyke came out first, followed by Sands. Then came Blake, and lastly Pomp crossed the threshold and he saw Barney.

"Golly, youse a sight to cure sore eyes, so you is! I'se glad ter see yer, as de ole man said when he caught Deacon Rastus in de chicken coop!" exclaimed Pomp.

"By the tall av Biddy Nolan's goat, that reached until ould Ireland and rang St. Patrick's bell, it's a happy man I am, Pomp, me black diamond, to see vez again!" replied Barney.

And the two eccentric old friends embraced and whirled along the passage for a moment in a sort of war dance of delight.

"Heaven be praised, we are all together again!" said Blake.

"But Hall?" exclaimed the doctor as he observed the steersman.

"Oh, he's all right now," replied Frank lightly, and then he explained in a few words that Hall had deserted Smith Brown's side.

Frank added the startling information that Smith Brown was really Professor Leonidas Wickersham, the insane inventor and scientist.

The surprise of all may be imagined.

The doctor was as amazed as Frank had been upon the reception of this revelation.

But he said:

"Now much that was mysterious is made clear. I can imagine that motives of jealousy may have been the incentive of the maniac, combined with a great ambition to distinguish himself. And now I think of it I have always heard that Prof. Wickersham was distinguished in former days for his boundless ambition."

"No doubt! But now to recapture the Queen

Clipper and secure the maniac who has occasioned us so much trouble and caused us so many perils!" replied Frank.

"What is your plan?" asked the doctor.

"To secure the insane professor and the two mutineers in a trap. To resort to stratagem to capture them without a struggle," replied the young inventor.

"Worra! Masther dear! Do yez mane that we are not to have a bit av a ruction wid the blackguards av the warruld, Beam and Driggs. Faith, an' if yez will only lave me have a round or two between mesel' an' me shillalah an' the two spaleens, it's no more throuble yez will have with them at all, at all," implored Barney.

"No, my idea is this. Hall will go on deck and decoy Smith Brown and the two mutineers into the cook's galley, under some pretense. Then he will slip out and fasten the door on them," replied Frank.

"Excellent! If the plan succeeds it will be turning the tables on the rascals splendidly!" said the doctor.

"I'll try it. But at a shout from me you must all be ready to rush on deck instantly," assented Hall.

Then he led the way to the foot of the companion stairs stealthily.

All the others silently followed the steersman. When they reached the foot of the companion stairs he signaled his companions to remain there, and then he went up to the deck.

A period of suspense and considerable anxiety ensued for Frank and his comrades. But they had not long to wait.

Presently a shout was uttered in Hall's voice.

"Come on!" cried Frank, and he bounded up the stairs.

"Whoop!" shouted Barney, and he and the others followed their young leader.

All gained the deck.

There they saw Hall standing before the closed door of the cook's galley. He had secured the door by means of two heavy bolts, with which it was provided.

No word from Hall was needed to tell them that he had entrapped the insane professor and the mutineers.

The kicks and blows showered on the bolted door, and the oaths and threats uttered by Smith Brown and Beam and Driggs, told that they were prisoners in the cook's galley.

"Gollie! Less's gib three cheers an' a big spotted tiger!" cried Pomp, in that moment of intense delight.

Barney, Hall and Blake entered into the spirit of the moment, and they joined with Pomp in giving three most hearty cheers.

"Treachery! Treachery! A thousand curses on you, Hall!" yelled Smith Brown.

"Your curses are powerless to harm any one. We only feel pity for you, because we know you are a maniac, a poor madman, and not responsible for what you have done," said Frank.

"A madman! Who dares say I'm mad?" screamed Smith Brown furiously.

"I do. We know now that you are really Professor Leonidas Wickersham, an escaped lunatic," replied Frank.

"It's a lie! A lie! A lie!" retorted the maniac. But Frank said no more to him.

He addressed the crew, however, and directed all to their posts.

"What am dis colored master of de cook-house gwine ter do? Am it come to pass dat I'se blocked out ob de back-shop, 'count of dem rascallions fo' good?" asked Pomp.

"No, no," replied Frank.

And he added:

"We shall presently place them under the hatch. They shall have an opportunity to enjoy some of the pleasures of imprisonment which we have experienced. In fact I mean to shut them up in the same compartment."

"Gollie, dat suits me! I'se contented an' happy, like a Souf Carlina nig, watchin' a possum bakin' in de oven, an' de hoe-cake in de ashes," replied Pomp in delighted tones.

Frank repaired to the central cabin and inspected the machinery there.

He also examined the fore and aft propelling engines.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE END OF SMITH BROWN—THE QUEEN CLIPPER APPARENTLY DOOMED.

FRANK was somewhat apprehensive that the machinery might have sustained some injury while the Queen Clipper was in possession of the mutineers.

But he was very much gratified to find on inspection that the machinery was intact and uninjured. It seemed that there had been no neglect.

All the bearings were found well oiled, and the plating of the several engines were clean and

polished as Frank had always caused them to be kept.

While Frank was inspecting the machinery of the wonderful aerial vessel he was accompanied by Doctor Vaneyke, and when all the engines had been carefully looked to the doctor asked:

"How do you mean to transfer our dangerous prisoners from the cook's galley to the hold?"

"I'll explain," replied Frank, and he went on to tell his plan.

The doctor approved of it, and Frank continued:

"The transfer of the prisoners below deck, may as well be made now as at any time. Indeed the sooner they are confined in the most secure portion of the vessel, the better I shall be satisfied."

Then he called Barney, Pomp, and Hall.

The three men named immediately presented themselves on the deck.

"You will each take a rifle from the arms room, and stand in line yonder," said Frank, and he indicated the side of the deck near the companion stairs, and in front of the door of the cook's galley.

The three men quickly secured the weapons Frank named, and placed themselves in a line as he had directed.

"Now I am about to let the prisoners out, and it will be your duty to escort them down to the prison compartment under the deck," continued Frank.

"Sure an' we'll attend to them," said Barney.

"Gollie! Dat's jiss what we will," affirmed Pomp.

Frank then went to the door of the cook's galley, and addressed the captain therein.

"I am about to open the door, and you will come out; but the moment you appear on deck, each one of you will be covered by a rifle in the hands of a marksman. You will be marched down to the prison-room where I was confined. Any attempt at resistance will be fatal to yourselves. The men on guard have orders to shoot you down if you resist." Frank's tones were stern and earnest.

Those who heard him could not fail to believe that he meant all he said.

When he had concluded he opened the door.

Then Beam and Driggs came out, looking very much crest-fallen and shame-faced.

But Smith Brown did not appear.

"Come, come, professor. We are waiting for you!" called out Frank.

But there was no answer.

"What is the matter with the madman?" asked Frank of Beam.

"Sulkin'. By gosh, he looks awful. I reckon he's mighty desperate," replied the Yankee.

And scarcely had he spoken, when his statement was confirmed in the most startling manner.

Suddenly Smith Brown bounded out of the cook's galley and darted for the rail.

"Halt!" cried Hall and Frank in the same breath, as the steersman leveled his rifle.

But the maniac only uttered a terrible laugh, and the succeeding instant he cleared the side rail at a bound and leaped off into space, uttering the most frightful screams that mortal man had ever heard.

Down, down through the dizzy space shot the insane professor, to be finally dashed to pieces upon the earth far below, it seemed.

Frank Reade and his companions shuddered as they witnessed the awful sight, and the doctor said solemnly:

"His spirit has gone to his Maker. Perhaps it is better so. The cloud that has blighted his mind here will pass away in the great hereafter, and his case was hopeless as far as the skill of man to accomplish a cure could go."

Then, while Barney and Pomp, with Hall, marched Beam and Driggs below deck, and secured the two mutineers in the prison compartment, Frank ordered the aeronef lowered.

This was done; the air-ship reached the lower ranges of the atmosphere; then it was seen that one of the great northern lakes lay below.

It had been Frank's intention to make a landing and give the remains of the insane professor decent burial. But now he decided that the body had found a grave at the bottom of the lake.

When night came on again the vessel was still sailing westward.

The night was a pleasant one, and the gentle wind favorable to the air-vessel.

The doctor and Frank sat on deck until a late hour enjoying the evening and discussing their recent adventures.

At the same time Beam and Driggs were plotting below deck.

Toward midnight the storm indicator foretold a cyclone, and so Frank ordered a descent, and the Queen Clipper was anchored by means of the great cable and heavy drag on the bank of a considerable stream at a height of a hundred feet.

Finally Frank and the doctor retired.

As he went to his cabin Frank paused for a moment at the door of the prison compartment to listen.

But he heard no sound, and so he concluded that Beam and Driggs were sleeping. But not so. They were awake, and waiting for the night to further advance before attempting a terrible deed of vengeance and destruction.

One great mistake had been made by the young inventor regarding his prisoners.

Before they were shut up in the prisoners' room they had not been carefully searched.

True, their weapons had been taken away, but they yet had dangerous implements in their possession when they were thrust into the quarters so recently occupied by Frank and his comrades.

Concealed on his person Driggs had a coil of fuse, and Beam had a small hinged auger, that shut up like a patent corkscrew, in his pocket. He also had a burglar's picklock.

At about midnight, when they knew the Queen Clipper was riding at anchor, the two desperadoes set to work to escape.

They had broken jail more than once in their time, and they began on the door intelligently.

First Beam picked the lock. Then he bored holes above each of the several bolts, and then easily drew them by means of a piece of heavy knit wire which he thrust through the auger hole.

The prison compartment adjoined the magazine on one side.

The bunks were on that side. But between them Beam bored a hole through the partition to the magazine, and Driggs' fuse was thrust through the opening thus made.

Then Beam lighted the fuse.

"Now, this time, I think, there will be no one to stop us. In ten minutes the Queen Clipper will be blown up, for a terrible explosion will ensue as soon as the fuse burns to the powder in the magazine," said Beam.

Then he and Driggs stole through the unfastened door and made their way to the deck.

Unseen they crept to the capstan where the great cable was secured.

Suddenly they climbed over the rail and descended the anchor cable hand over hand. This time there was no one to halt them.

In safety they reached the earth. The electric light had been burning on the Queen Clipper all the evening, and Beam and Driggs were in its brilliant diverging halo when they reached the ground.

"Now to cut the anchor-rope!" said Beam, and he produced a knife he had concealed in his boot and attacked the rope with it.

In a few moments the cable was cut.

The Queen Clipper drifted slowly away before the wind.

Still there was no evidence that any one on board it knew the ship was adrift.

Beam and Driggs fled, but they paused from time to time to look back at the vessel. They thought it would be blown to atoms.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MIRACULOUSLY SAVED--DRIVEN BEFORE THE STORM.

As stated, some time previously, before the airship was anchored, the storm indicators foretold the approach of a storm.

The heavens had become overcast, and up from the southward dark clouds drifted in serried ranks—one behind the other like an advance battalion, heralding the battle of the elements that was soon to ensue.

The atmosphere became tense and charged with electric currents, while afar, along the horizon, the lightning painted erratic tracings upon the background of the darkened sky.

The approaching storm was gathering its forces in the southern realms of the heavens, and the first gust of wind from that quarter soon struck the Queen Clipper as she drifted onward after the escaped mutineers severed the anchor rope.

It was customary for all the crew to sleep when the ship was at anchor, save indeed one man, who stood watch usually.

On this night, however, even the watchman slept. He was Blake, the assistant helmsman, and although he was a most trustworthy man, always conscientious in the discharge of duty, on this occasion he had vainly struggled against the masterful inclination for somnolency which had ultimately conquered him.

But when the first gust of wind struck the Queen Clipper it aroused Blake, and he started up wide awake. The next moment a second gust caught the air-ship broadside, and caused it to rock dangerously, while the center of gravity of the suspensory helices was so disturbed that they ground upon the bearings with a rasping sound, like many files working in unison.

Blake uttered a shout, and Chief Engineer Sands, who was sleeping in the central deck-house, was awakened at once.

The shipwrecked darky who had been rescued from the island in the South Pacific was in the central cabin also, and he sprang up in terror.

Evidently he thought the air vessel was about to turn bottom side up, for he fell on his knees and began to entreat Sands to save him.

The strange darky had not yet become accustomed to aerial navigation, and he was at all times in dread of an accident.

Sands did not heed the darky, but he sprang to the levers and turned off the electric currents from the suspensory engine partially, so that the friction of the helices would be diminished as the rapidity of their revolutions was decreased.

The alarming grinding sound caused him to fear that some damage might ensue to the suspensory screws. Barney, Pomp and Steersman Hall heard Blake's shout, and they felt the ship surge until it seemed to them that the deck must be standing almost perpendicular.

They were all intensely alarmed.

But as they scrambled out of their bunks the Queen Clipper righted herself, and when they gained the deck a few moments later, the vessel was speeding northward, driven by the tremendous force of the tornado.

The wind-storm was now upon the vessel.

The propellers were almost useless, and as for combating the gale or directing the ship in a course adverse to the tornado, they were entirely powerless.

At that moment Frank Reade and Dr. Vaneyke arrived on deck.

It was the general impression of all the crew that the force of the wind had forced the aeronef to exert so great a strain upon the anchor rope as to sever it.

Beholding the vessel driven before the gale relentlessly, as she now was, Frank Reade at once came to the same conclusion.

"So the cyclone has blown us from our anchorage! Well, all we can do is to run before the wind. It is evident that we can neither ascend out of the reach of the gale, or elude it by an earthward flight, as it extends from the highest to the lowest planes of the atmosphere," said he to the doctor.

Then he issued orders to keep the Queen Clipper before the wind and a thrilling race in the air ensued. The speed of the aeronef was something wonderful. Distance was annihilated, space ceased to become a consideration.

The ten moments, which Beam had said must elapse before the fuse he had left burning in the compartment of the hold—where he and Driggs had been confined—would reach the powder in the magazine and blow up the aerial craft, had now passed three times over.

But the explosion had not taken place, and yet all on board the vessel, which the mutineers supposed they had downed, were ignorant of the peril which the escaped villains had planned.

Presently it occurred to Frank to draw up the anchor rope, which was now trailing under the vessel, and he did so, assisted by Pomp and Barney.

"Fat's this I dunno! Faith an' it seems to me the rope has been cut!" exclaimed the Irishman, as he and Pomp were coiling the cable rope on the capstan.

"What! The anchor rope cut! You must be mistaken, I think," said Frank incredulously.

"Gollie, Barney done hit de tru' on-de head fo' once suah! Look yere, Mars Frank. Ain't dat a clean cut done wid er knife er a razor, sub?"

Pomp held up the severed end of the anchor rope for Frank's inspection.

"You are right! The rope has been cut. Ah! some one purposely set us adrift in this storm. But who could have had any reason to thus send us adrift?"

"Dunno! 'Deed I've got to gib up dat question," said Pomp.

"Faith, an' it's a bit av a conundrum that's too much for me, too," replied Barney.

Just then the doctor cried:

"Frank, I am sure I smell something burning in the hold. The fumes ascend from the companion-way."

The doctor was standing at the head of the companion stairs.

"It seems to me that powder is burning!" added the doctor, in alarmed tones.

"Powder! Good heavens! The magazine is stored with powder. If a spark of fire should penetrate to the explosives, we are lost!" cried Frank.

Then he sprang down the companion stairs.

Barney, Pomp and the doctor followed the lead of the young inventor, and at the foot of the stairs they found the smoke coming from the direction of the compartment in which they had imprisoned Beam and Driggs.

Frank rushed to the door of the prisonroom.

He knew then that the smoke came from within it, for the fumes found their way through the easement, and the holes Beam had bored to reach the bolts.

Seizing the door knob Frank tried the door

and as he anticipated, since he had now a suspicion of the truth, it yielded.

The noxious smoke filled Frank's lungs as he opened the door, but only darkness and silence seemed to hold possession of the prison-room.

"A light! Quick with my lantern from my cabin, Barney," cried Frank.

In his haste he had descended from the deck without waiting to procure a light.

powder. This was an accident that sometimes happens in making coil fuses of this kind.

Frank realized that the preservation of the aerial vessel and all on board it was due to the trifling oversight in the manufacture of a fuse.

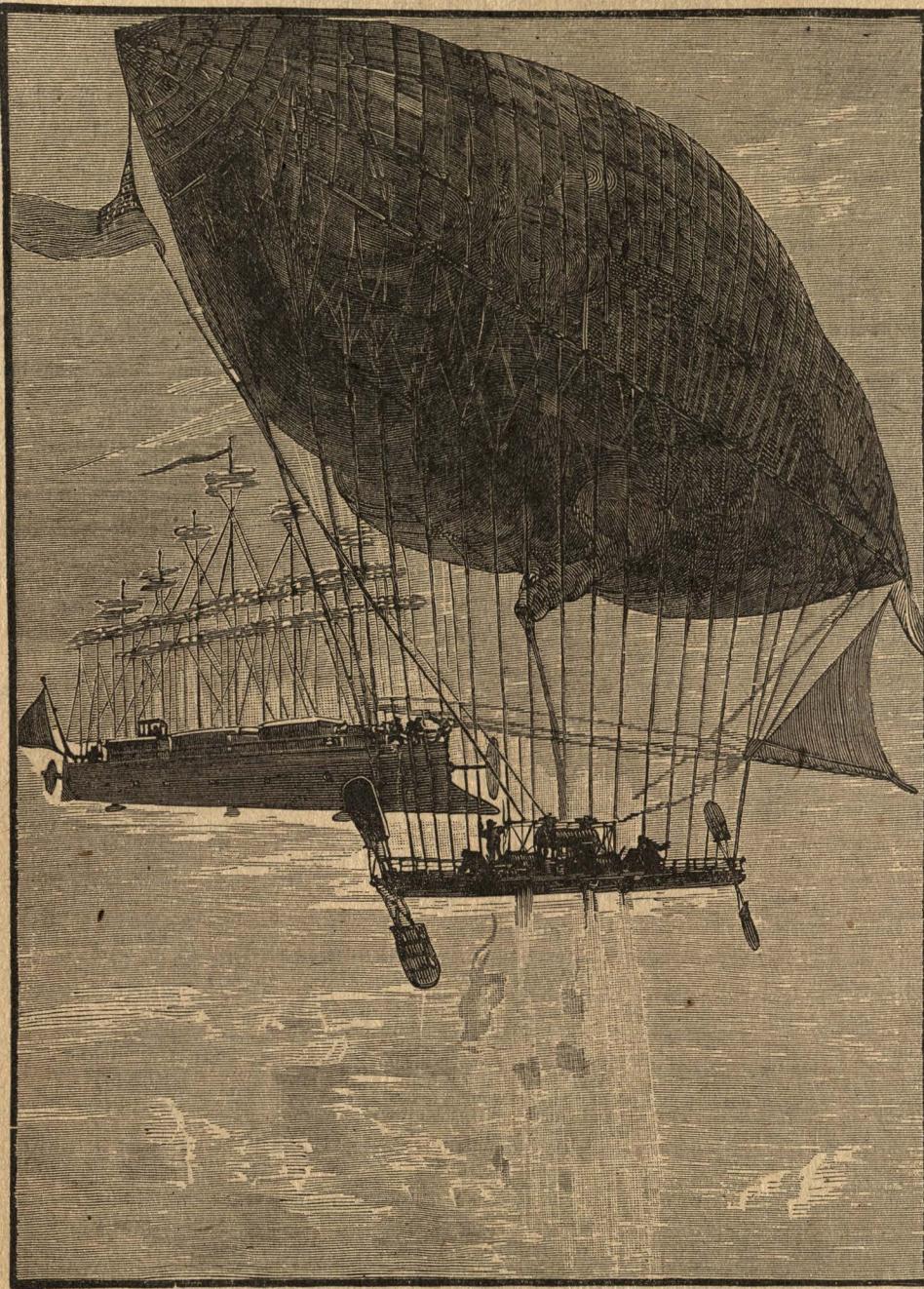
"I comprehend now who cut the anchor chain, Beam and Driggs did that, after descending by the escape of Beam and Driggs, were informed of

means of it to the ground, and they thought they had left us all to meet a swift and terrible doom."

CHAPTER LIX.
THE RED RIVER FLOOD—A SUBMERGED COUNTRY—RESCUING SETTLERS.

FRANK led the way back to the deck, and the members of the crew, who were as yet ignorant of

the fact. And Frank told of the fiendish attempt the vil-



The Queen Clipper running down a strange flying machine attached to a balloon in mid-air.

Barney rushed away, and almost instantly he returned with a lighted lantern in his hand.

Then it was seen that the room in which the two mutineers had been confined was empty.

And Frank saw the coil of fuse the mutineers had fired. It had burned almost to the hole in the partition that separated the room from the powder magazine.

Then the fuse had gone out.

Frank snatched it up and examined it, while his face turned white for an instant, and a thrill went through his nerves, as he comprehended how near the Queen Clipper had come to destruction.

At the point where the fuse had gone out it was defective. There, for a space of several inches, it was filled only with wadding of paper, instead of

Truly the attempt at the destruction of the Queen Clipper was worthy of fiends. But the rascals are beyond our reach, at least for the present, and so we cannot punish them," said Frank.

"For my part I am thankful that we are well rid of the scoundrels," replied the doctor.

"Sure an' I'm sorry the blackguards got off before Pomp an' meself had a bit av a ruction wid them. But, begob, if iver we mate them again we'll have a shindy wid them an' bate the heads off the blackguards," threatened Barney.

lains had made to destroy the Queen Clipper. Little did he think that this was not the first attempt of the kind made by the escaped rascals, or that the ship had on another occasion been saved by Smith Brown.

The wind storm continued for hours, and when the next day dawned it had not subsided entirely. But for some time there had been a gradual decadence of the force, and the young inventor knew that the worst was over.

During the night the direction of the gale had shifted rather suddenly from due north to west. Now at dawn Frank made an observation by means of the rising sun, and his nautical calculation apprised him of the fact that the aeronef was over Manitoba.

As the wind was now not sufficiently strong to resist the propeller successfully Frank determined on a southern course.

Accordingly the Queen Clipper was skillfully tacked about before the wind, and a start was made against the atmospherical current.

In a time so short as to astonish one who measured distance by the speed of earthly modes of transportation, the vessel that navigated the orbit of the globe so successfully was over the Red River valley of the north.

The Red River valley of Dakota is one of the richest and most fertile of all the territory of the north-west. The richness of the soil, which is of a loamy character, being justly attributed to some extent to the overflow of the river which brings rich deposits with its floods.

There had been heavy rain in the north-west recently, and all the streams and rivers were flooded. The Red River drains a large section of country, and consequently it was now at the flood-tide, as we may say.

Doctor Vaneyke was standing at the rail when he made the discovery through his telescope or field-glass, with which he was inspecting the surrounding country.

"Frank!" shouted the doctor in some excitement, "as I live, the whole country yonder is under water. The Red river has burst from its channel. The highest banks have overflowed, and the valley is almost entirely submerged for a long distance."

This was true, as the young inventor saw at once, upon making an inspection through the doctor's glass.

The scene was an impressive one, and full of thrilling interest.

The muddy waves rushed furiously along carrying on their yellow crest fences, barns and settlers' dwellings which had been caught in the flood.

The settlers who had made their homes in the valley were fleeing for the high lands beyond the reach of the encroaching flood.

In the distance several families were to be seen in full retreat, driving their stock before them to the highlands.

But some families had not taken to flight in time, as Frank presently discovered. He saw a small cabin drifting upon the waves, rocking and pitching dangerously, as each moment the waves threatened to engulf it.

And upon the roof of the cabin was a woman with a babe in her arms, and another small child clinging to her skirts.

The cabin had been swept from its foundation, and carried away on the flood before its inmates had time to escape.

At a distance further down stream Frank beheld another family in peril.

There a cabin, built upon a mound, elevated considerably above the immediately surrounding country, was environed by the flood.

And each moment the waves were descending nearer and nearer to the solitary cabin.

Soon, it was clear, the waves would submerge the mound upon which the cabin stood, and then, in all likelihood, the structure would be washed from its foundation and carried away.

The inmates of the water-bound cabin could be seen at the doors and windows, wringing their hands, and vainly shouting for assistance.

They had no boat. They had been aroused from sleep just at dawn by the noise of the rushing waters which had already hemmed them in.

"Here is work for us! The Queen Clipper has now another opportunity to render suffering, imperiled humanity assistance. We will go to the rescue!" cried noble-hearted Frank Reade.

"But as there is more than one family in peril we will first seek to save those who are most closely menaced by the common danger?" asked the doctor.

"Yes. First to rescue the woman and her children from the cabin adrift on the waves. Then we will carry the water-bound inmates of the cabin on the mound beyond the reach of the flood," replied Frank.

The air-ship was immediately headed for the drifting cabin by Frank's orders.

In a few moments it sailed gracefully downward until the great fore and aft propellers almost beat the yellow waves beside the floating cabin.

The woman and children on the habitation gazed upon the strange craft from the sky in wonder and alarm. The good woman uttered a shrill scream, and the children began to cry.

But the succeeding moment, seeing the kindly faces on the deck of the air-ship, and hearing Frank Reade's pleasant voice the settler's wife was reassured, and her natural courage returned.

"We mean to save you! Catch this line and drop the noose over the chimney!" called out Frank, and he flung the woman a rope.

She caught it and secured it as directed, while the cabin continued to be carried onward by the waves, and the Queen Clipper kept pace with it.

In a moment or so Barney and Pomp reached the roof of the house by means of the rope, and while the Irishman assisted the woman to gain the deck of the air vessel with the infant, Pomp lifted the other child in his arms and made his way along the rope back to the ship.

A moment after Barney's charges were safe on deck Pomp also reached it with the other rescued one in his strong arms. The mother clasped both children in her arms, and as she clasped them to her heart she called down Heaven's blessings upon the heads of her brave preservers.

The air-ship was immediately put about, and all speed was made for the cabin surrounded by the rising flood.

The Queen Clipper soon descended on the little space of dry land before the door of the cabin, which was not as yet submerged.

The inmates gazed upon the wonderful aerial craft in the greatest astonishment. They were simple, ignorant people, and they were not only astonished, but frightened. At first they closed the cabin door, and refused to come forth.

Frank and his comrade heard a shrill voice from within the cabin say:

"Durn my skin if I don't think ther critter is some o' the devil's work, what we've hern tell on! Fasten ther door, an' less trust ter Providence fer salvation. I'm a pillar inter the Mthodoy meetin' house, an' I don't want no help from the power o' Satan!"

"Nonsense! Have you never heard of Frank Reade and his invention?" shouted the young inventor.

"Pears like I hev," answered the old settler. "He's ther feller that went traveling through the country with an electric team once, ain't he?"

"Yes, and I am Frank Reade. This is merely my last invention—a flying machine, nothing more."

"I want ter know! So you're the critter I read about in the papers, be ye? Wall, wall, who would have thunk it? It's amazin'. But I say, yer won't kerry us outen the kniry, will ye, if we git onter yer thrashin'-machine?"

"No. I only seek to rescue you."

"Much obleeged. Sally, open the door."

The door opened, and the old settler and his family were taken on board.

Then the Queen Clipper was got under way immediately, and she sailed to high land.

"I say, boss, couldn't engage you to do my season's thrashin' with yer machine, could I?" asked the old farmer, who was looking at everything in open-mouthed wonderment.

"No. This is a ship of the air, not a thrashin' machine."

"Not a stump-pull-er?"

"No."

"Nor a cider-machine?"

"No!" and Frank walked away, somewhat amused. But he saw that the old man was innocent enough in asking his questions.

CHAPTER LX.

A SUSPICIOUS OLD SETTLER—"A BIT AV A RUCTION"—THE SIOUX RAIDERS.

The other members of the old settler's family thanked Frank warmly for rescuing them, and seemed a trifle ashamed of the old man's eccentricity.

But the old fellow had a good heart, and presently when Frank was about to land the rescued ones, he came up to the young inventor and extended a hand that had seen much toil and little water recently, saying:

"Much obleeged, mister, much obleeged. Next time you come this way drop in."

"Not if the water is up."

"I mean drop in and see us, an' durn me if I don't kill a sheep."

"Thanks. I appre ciate your invitation."

"But," eying Frank a trifle doubtfully, "are ye sure ye ain't a lightnin' rod man, or ye ain't got somebody's note ye want to sell cheap, or ye ain't agent fer patent gate posts?"

"Not any," replied Frank, laughing.

"Then it's all right. I'm agin all them fellers. Been tuck in by 'em all in turn. But I've got a shotgun an' a new pair o' specs now, an' durn my old hide if I don't fill the next agent that comes up this way so full o' shot he kin sell himself fer sinkers ter the fish-line factory down ter Fargo. I swan I will, by gravy!"

"A most commendable resolution," replied Frank.

And then leaving the rescued settlers in safety, the air vessel continued southward.

There was considerable excitement concerning recent mining discoveries in Montana when Frank left Readestown to embark on his present eventful voyage.

He now resolved to take a look at the Montana gold country, so he had the course of the Queen Clipper again changed.

The vessel ran due west for a time and was soon over Montana.

Frank kept a look out with his telescope, and it was not very long before he discovered a mining hamlet among the mountains in the distance.

Just then he heard a yell.

It was a wild Irish whoop, and Barney uttered it.

Frank turned and saw Barney dancing about, spitting and choking as if he had swallowed a coal of fire.

"Worra, worra! Begob, the nagur has kilt me wid the bomb-shell inside av the cake he gave me!" roared Barney.

And then Frank saw Pomp at the door of the cook's galley grinning with delight, so that a row of ivories, extending from ear to ear, had become the most striking feature of his ebony face.

"Dat's how I done got square wid yer, Irish, for blowin' de top ob me head off wid dat loaded cigar some time ago," said Pomp.

"I'm a paciful mon, but, bedad, whin a nagur tries to commit susanside on an Irishman, faith, an' the toime for war has come!" the irate Barney cried.

"Dat's all right. Ise ready fo' you. I done got de top ob my ole pile-driver iron-plated fo' business!" retorted Pomp, patting the top of his head.

"Be the harp av Tara, it's accordin' to the Marquis av Geeseberry I'll fight wid ye, nagur, like a gentleman."

"Do buttin' count in dat line ob battle, sah?"

"No, begob!"

"Then Ise out."

"Ye won't fight?"

"Not 'cordin' to Marquis ob Geeseberry, sah."

"But, be the powers, I demand satisfaction! Yez gave me a cake filled wid red pepper, an I swallered enough av it that it makes me think a torch-light procession is marchin' inside av me."

"Yah, yah! Dat ought to make yer warm—warm-hearted and friendly."

"Faith, an' so it does. Worra! wouldn't I like to caress yez wid me bunch av fives, under the jaw, ye blackguard yez!"

"Come on, Irish."

"Begob, I will, if ye will lave yer buttin' out av the foight."

"Dat's my stronghold. Ise got some sense. Ipose Ise gwine ter stan' up an' git punched 'cordin' to Marquis ob Geeseberry when I kin help it? No, sah!"

"Begob, it's a coward yez are, nagur!" cried Barney, edging toward Pomp.

"No, sah; Ise got iron in my blood."

"Hi, hi! what the devil is that, I dunno."

Barney pointed behind Pomp.

The darky turned to look, and that was just what Barney counted on.

He made one leap and caught Pomp a tremendous blow under the chin.

Pomp went down as if a mule had kicked him. "Whoop! Git up an' face an Irish gentleman, will yez. Faith an' that's a Marquis av Geeseberry, pop! How do ye like it, nagur? There's more in stock. We haven't sold out. Yez can git more where that came from!" cried Barney in great exultation.

But Pomp was on his feet almost before Barney knew it, and ducking his bullet head, he uttered a roar like a mad bull and rushed at the Irishman.

Barney retreated.

But the next instant he was telescoped.

Over he went in turn and then the laugh was on the darky's side.

"Dat yere was a Souf Carolina paster, an' it done beat de Markiss of Geeseberry clean out! Time, Irish! Come an' see me some mo'. Come right along. Still dar am room. Do not delay, as Deacon Sniffball says to do po' sinner, when he holes meetin' at de high-toned colored synagogue in Readestown," Pomp cried.

Barney picked himself up and ruefully felt himself.

"Wait, nagur, wait until I see if I'm all here, for be the powers av turf I'm thinkin' a part av me wint overboard."

"Da's all right. Three minutes between rounds."

"Be gob, that's all I want, ye nagur pirate."

"Barney," cried Frank at that juncture, "you and Pomp will take a rest. You have had a little set-to, and honors are even. I pronounce the battle a draw. Shake hands, and then go about your duty."

"All right; dat's de way most ob de prize fights end," replied Pomp.

"Faith, an' it is, an' we don't want to be out av the fashion. So ther's me hand, nagur," said Barney.

And the two old friends shook hands and walked off together on the best of terms again.

"They couldn't exist if they didn't have a row occasionally, unless I keep them busy fighting

outsiders," said Frank to the doctor, who stood by laughing.

Some little time subsequently a landing was made near a mining town.

The whole camp turned out to see the Queen Clipper. The miners were the most astonished set of men imaginable. They regarded the air-ship as the greatest wonder of modern times, and Frank had to explain all about it to satisfy their curiosity.

All at once a man rushed in from the adjacent mines, where shafts and tunnels were being worked in the search for gold.

"A cave in! A cave in of the big tunnel!" shouted the excited messenger, from the scene of the accident.

The crowd dispersed as if by magic.

All hands started for the mines, and Frank had the Queen Clipper got under way and followed above the heads of the populace.

Very soon the miners reached the closed mouth of a tunnel in a mountain wall. There the cave in had occurred.

A great mass of earth and rock had crushed in the roof of the tunnel and completely closed it.

Frank caused a landing to be made again near the mouth of the tunnel, and then the young inventor addressed the excited miners.

He proposed to help rescue the men who were shut in the mine by the fall of the roof. He was informed there were at least a dozen and probably more than that number of men in the mines.

While Frank was talking and offering his services and the use of his electric appliances and high explosives for blasting away the rocks that had shut the imperiled miners up in the tunnel, there came a shout, from down the defile in which the mines were located, and a mounted man dashed up and shouted:

"Indians—Indians! The Sioux are on the war-path and coming this way with great force."

Frank was on the deck of the air-ship then, and he ran into the stern cabin to get some dynamite shells which were stored there. As he was securing them he chanced upon a singular drawing, which he knew at a glance must have been made by Smith Brown. It represented the Queen Clipper running down a strange flying machine attached to a balloon in mid-air.

Returning to the deck, Frank immediately saw the terrible Indian army, several hundred strong, charging up the defile, yelling like fiends, and he knew there was a desperate conflict impending.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE AERIAL BATTERY—REPULSE OF THE INDIANS—OLD FRIENDS MEET.

THE Indians were yet at a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile when Frank discovered them.

But he knew that not a moment must be lost in preparing to meet them. As if by common consent the young inventor was recognized as a competent leader, and not only were his orders immediately obeyed by his own men, but also by the miners.

There were several carts standing near the mouth of the tunnel, in which the fall of the roof had imprisoned the miners. Frank was intent upon rescuing from a living grave.

He at once directed that those carts be drawn across the defile to serve as a barricade between the Queen Clipper and the approaching savages.

All hands worked with a will to accomplish this, and in a few moments the carts were placed in the desired positions.

Behind this improvised breastwork the miners stationed themselves, while for the time they were compelled to desist from all efforts looking to the release of the men imprisoned in the mines.

The savages were mounted, and they urged their ponies at the line of carts, yelling like fiends. As soon as they were within rifle-range, they opened fire on the whites, sending a fusillade of bullets at the rude fortification.

But this volley was met with a return fire from the miners, which proved destructive, as the mounted savages presented an excellent mark for the whites.

Indians seldom hold to a charge in which they are met by a determined resistance, and the telling volley with which their onset was received in this instance somewhat dampened their ardor at once.

They wavered for a moment, and then fell back, but only to gather fresh impetus for a new charge.

Then they rushed their ponies at the fortifications, as if fully resolved to carry everything before them this time, at all hazards.

But Frank Reade was now ready to assume a prominent part in the thrilling contest.

He had taken on board the Queen Clipper, beside his own crew, all the miners he could carry conveniently on the deck.

And the cannon was ready for action, manned by Pomp and Barney, who were, of course, most anxious to take part in the conflict.

Frank and Doctor Vaneyke had stationed themselves by the rail amidship, and between them was placed the box of dynamite shells or torpedoes which Frank had brought out of the stern cabin.

The miners were disposed the entire length of the air-ship, and each man held his rifle in readiness to fire upon the enemy at the word.

Sands, Hall and Blake were in charge of the engines, and they understood that the signal to get the ship of the air under way might be received at any moment.

As the Indians returned to the assault with renewed fury, the expected signal, for which the engineers were waiting, was received from Frank Reade.

At once Sands started the great suspensory engine, and as the motive power imparted motion to the helices, at the heads of thirty-seven masts causing them to revolve with remarkable speed the Queen Clipper left the earth like a thing of life and soared upward.

In a moment the aerial wonder was discovered by the savages, and a chorus of yells burst from the throats of the alarmed and astonished redmen.

Of course, as they had not previously seen the Queen Clipper, they had never beheld anything of the sort before.

The onrushing legion reined in their ponies, as if by one accord, while every eye was turned upon the mighty wonder of the sky.

A complete silence fell upon the Indian band for a moment, and as the character of the American aboriginal tribes is essentially superstitious, it may be inferred that at first they regarded the aeronef as a supernatural creation.

But while the Indians continued to watch the vessel of the sky they presently detected the presence of their natural enemies—"the pale-faces"—upon it.

And then their transient spell was broken. Instantly the restraining influence of fear departed, and they were ready to fight this new air-sailing wonder of their white foemen.

A mighty yell that echoed and reechoed from the frowning battlements of the wild, rocky pass, went up from the savages as they mastered their first fears at the discovery of the Queen Clipper.

Then a volley from their weapons was discharged at the air-ship.

But no one on board the aerial craft was hit, and as he and Dr. Vaneyke began to hurl the dynamite torpedoes down among the enemy, Frank gave his men the order to fire.

It was promptly obeyed.

The roar of the cannon and the detonation of the musketry made a pandemonium of sounds, and the shrieks of the savages increased the tumult.

The execution done by the torpedoes, which exploded among the murderous redskins by their own concussion upon striking the earth, was frightful.

And the cannon ball reaped its harvest of death, while the rifle shots augmented the general destruction.

The savages wheeled their ponies and fled.

The Queen Clipper pursued them for some distance, and dealt destruction on all sides among the fleeing foe.

Satisfied at length that the Indians were thoroughly demoralized, and not likely to return Frank abandoned the pursuit of them.

The Queen Clipper was put about, and the return voyage to the scene of the mining accident was swiftly made.

When the air-ship arrived before the mouth of the tunnel in the defile again, Frank found that the miners had already begun to dig for their entombed comrades.

As soon as a landing was made, the young inventor got out some electric drills, made of the most highly tempered steel, that could readily cut the most flinty rock.

The Queen Clipper's electric currents were utilized to drive the drills, by means of a portable engine, connected to the great ship-battery by means of wires.

Frank personally superintended the setting up of the drill-engine, and the task of drilling the great rocks that closed the tunnel began.

Under the electric current, the steel drills worked like lightning, boring blasting-holes with a speed the miners could scarcely credit, even under the evidence of their own eye-sight.

Ho! hole after hole was bored, and then the work of blasting away the rock commenced. Frank employed dynamite cartridges of his own make which were probably the most powerful explosives known, for with them contained dynamite a certain percentage of nitro-glycerine was incorporated.

Thus additional force was acquired.

It was not surprising that the result of using these cartridges should have been all that could be desired.

The great rocks were riven as though torn asunder by the hands of unseen giants, and very

soon the cave-in was penetrated and the entombed miners were found.

All save two who had been caught in the fall and crushed out of human semblance under the weight of rocks were alive and uninjured.

A scene of great rejoicing ensued, and although the blessing of the miners, whose hearts were overflowing with gratitude, were showered upon Frank Reade he felt well repaid without that, by the knowledge that he had saved many precious human lives.

Soon after the entombed miners were rescued a scouting party of United States troops, sent out from a neighboring government post to look for the hostile Indians, whom Frank had put to flight, arrived.

Much to his surprise as well as delight, Frank found that one, Captain Archer, an old friend of his, whom he had not met in some years, was in command of the detachment.

Captain Archer was well pleased to meet Frank, and they conversed about other days and mutual friends, as was natural they should.

But presently Captain Archer said:

"You know, I presume, that my brother Richard's Arctic exploring vessel sent out by an English syndicate to look for the fatal will-o'-the-wisp, the unknown passage, has been reported lost?"

Frank assented, and Captain Archer continued:

"Well, I have received startling news from brother Richard within five days."

"What news?" asked Frank, eagerly, for Richard Archer, as well as the soldier captain, was his valued friend.

CHAPTER LXII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA—A NOBLE OFFER—MR. BUNCO IS GREETED.

AFTER a pause Captain Frederick Archer replied to Frank's inquiry, saying:

"I have received intelligence from the Arctic Sea, in the form a letter from my brother Richard."

"Ah! Then his vessel was not lost, despite the general impression to the contrary?" answered Frank in a tone of relief.

"His vessel is as good as lost, since it is disabled and ice-bound in the far Arctic seas. But I must explain the miraculous manner in which my brother's message reached me."

"Yes, by all means do so."

"The carrier of the message was the currents of the ocean. My brother wrote it and sent it adrift in the Polar sea. It was incased in an oaken cask, and it was picked up by an American coasting vessel off the coast of Alaska."

"Fortune favored the flotsam of the ocean."

"Yes; and five days since the message, which was addressed to me, reached the fort where I am stationed. It had been forwarded from San Francisco by the captain of the vessel who picked it up at sea."

"Have you the message with you?" asked Frank.

"No, I left it at the fort when I started out on this scouting expedition. But I can tell you the contents of the letter."

"Then do so by all means. I am very much interested, and I have an idea that may be of service to the ice-bound prisoners of the frozen sea."

"Well, Richard's letter was dated 70 deg. north latitude—in the Arctic Ocean, of course—and it briefly stated that the vessel he commanded had been seriously damaged, and was then frozen in. But the concluding paragraphs seemed to indicate that human enemies menaced the vessel. The letter ended thus: 'Savage tribes of Northern natives are in the neighborhood, and we fear they will discover us; but we most dread the men of convicts' camp among the icy hills not far distant.'"

"A convicts' camp in those Arctic lands! This is surprising. But, Fred, I am going to make you an offer. First, however, tell me what you propose to do about your brother's deliverance?" said Frank.

"I mean to save him. I have already secured leave of absence from the army. I shall leave for San Francisco, and there, backed as I hope, by the syndicate which sent my brother to the Arctic sea, I intend to fit out an expedition immediately to go to his relief."

"Bravely said. I anticipated something of the sort. And now for my proposition. What do you say to making the voyage to the Arctic sea in my air-ship?"

"Do you really mean that? Are you serious, Frank?"

"I was never more so. I am a-going in search of Richard on my own account in my Queen Clipper, if you will accompany me you are a thousand times welcome."

"Your hand, Frank. You are the same noble fellow you were in our college days."

"Well, I'm always ready to serve a friend, but I

make no virtue of that, though friendship is too often but an empty word."

"Having a well known, but not always acknowledged relation to pocketbook," added Archer, smilingly.

"Yes. You're exactly right, old fellow."

"Well, I am more than delighted to accept your generous offer. I'll sail with you. The air-ship is a wonder, and I have as much faith in her as I have in her captain. More it is needless for me to say."

"Right, Fred. And you have not put your faith in a broken reed if you have trusted to Frank Reade," replied the inventor lightly.

"Still a punster, eh? Well, seriously what preparations for our Arctic voyage will be necessary, and when shall we start?" asked Archer.

"In a short time. We will make a run to Chicago and there take on board supplies necessary for a long Arctic cruise, for we may have a lengthy search before us. I have been in the Arctic regions with the Queen Clipper already, but my outfit is not intended for a long stay in such a frigid land."

Just at this juncture Doctor Vaneyke came up and Frank introduced him to Captain Archer, who made known the project upon which he and Frank had just decided.

Further conversation ensued and Archer repeated to the good doctor the concluding paragraphs of the letter from his brother, the Arctic castaway.

Frank commented upon the statement regarding the existence of an encampment of convicts in the far Arctic lands, and expressed his surprise at such a thing.

But Dr. Vaneyke said nothing. Had Frank or the officers observed him closely when the convicts were mentioned, however, they might have seen the old scientist start perceptibly.

If Dr. Vaneyke had a secret he did not disclose it. If he had any personal knowledge of the facts stated in the message rescued from the sea he did not make it known.

Frank showed Archer over the ship of the air, and the officer's admiration and wonder at all he saw was freely expressed.

It was arranged that he should join the vessel the next day.

With the scouting party of cavalry, commanded by Captain Archer, an English "chappie" making a Western tour, had come from the fort.

He was introduced to Frank as Mr. Mowberry St. George Bungee, and in company with Captain Archer and Frank, the English tourist, who was a dapper little man, who had an exalted opinion of himself and everything "English, you know," went to the grocery store of the mines.

There Bija Smartweed, an old countrywoman of the pronounced hayseed variety kept store.

Half a dozen of Smartweed's family with hen's nests in their hair, and the soil of the great and woolly West on their brogans, were present, spitting tobacco juice and swappin' lies.

Smartweed had just sanded the sugar, watered the molasses and fine-cut, and related a certain experience which had befallen him when he "went ter New York to see his brother Lige," when the door opened and in walked Frank Reade, Captain Archer and the English tourist.

Archer knew Smartweed, and he introduced Frank. Then he presented the Englishman, saying:

"Mr. Smartweed, Mr. Bunco, recently from New York, but a—"

Then he was interrupted:

"Bunco! bunco!" fairly snorted Smartweed, and he spit out half a pound of fine-cut and yelled to his admiring townsmen:

"That's him! That's Bunco, an you've hern me jist tell how I wuz dun outen ther price o' a full keel load o' hogs in New York by his game. Whoop! I've been lookin' fef him ever since. Come on, boys!"

And Smartweed made a dive at Mr. Bunco, and up rose all these hayseedly gentlemen, and they went for Mr. Bunco in a warm and Western way.

He was hustled and tussled and hurried to a horse pond outside amid the wrathful, and we are pained to add, somewhat profane outcries of those gentlemen, who held close communion with nature as an every day occupation.

It was all done so quickly, so surprisingly that Frank or Archer had not been able to interfere before Mr. Bunco was in close communion with the bottom of the horse pond, and those agricultural gentlemen might have made him fare worse, but Frank gave the necessary explanations, and so "the chappie from over the watah" was allowed to get out of the water alive.

He was a wilted "chappie."

And in language which could not be set to music he reviled those honest sons of the soil, and vowed the first boat that crossed "the big pond" should carry him out of the "blawsted, bloomin' country, ba Jove!"

Frank and Captain Archer had a laugh, but they

turned their backs so Mr. Bunco would not see them.

He of the unfortunate name was glad to get away, and although Mr. Smartweed and the wild and woolly gentleman who had assisted in the celebration made haste to express their regrets, Mr. Bunco would not listen.

Then an event unknown in the history of the territory transpired.

Mr. Smartweed offered to stand treat, and Mr. Bunco declined, whereupon the store-keeper voiced the sentiment that Mr. Bunco was "a darned skunk."

But that worthy was out of hearing, so he had no knowledge of the fragrant opinion that the Western gentleman had formed of him.

The next day, in accordance with his promise, Captain Archer came on board the Queen Clipper ready for the proposed voyage.

The vessel was promptly gotten under way and headed for the metropolis of the West.

The voyage to Chicago was an uneventful one, and the Queen Clipper finally made the earth on the lake shore in the park.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A CARELESS CHINAMAN—A HUNGRY DOG—TWO HILARIOUS FRIENDS AND TWO POLICEMEN.

The usual excitement and curiosity which the coming of the Queen Clipper always occasioned when she made a landing near civilized men was evinced by the citizens of Chicago.

Great crowds thronged the park constantly, and more than one enterprising Western showman or dime museum "fiend" approached Frank with seductive offers for an engagement of his wonder of the air.

But of course the inventor only laughed at these gentlemen, and finally they desisted.

The doctor explained the air ship in an off-hand lecture to the crowd so satisfactorily that those who heard him had their curiosity fully satisfied.

Frank dismissed the shipwrecked darky when a landing had been made in Chicago, and the colored pilgrim said:

"I se berry much bleeged to you, sah, an' I se mighty glad to quit. I doan' take no stock in sich goin' on agin nature as dat flyin' machine am noway, sah."

Frank was as glad to get rid of the shipwrecked darky as that personage could possibly be to leave the air vessel, for the inventor had discovered that the rescued black was a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow.

The supplies needed were at once purchased by Frank and Captain Archer. They consulted several authentic books, written by Arctic explorers, and so got a pretty good idea of all that they would be likely to need.

Meantime, while Frank and his friend were out purchasing supplies Barney and Pomp also left the Queen Clipper.

"Be me sowl," said Barney, "it's so long since I was on a rale ould Irish spree that begob it's forgittin' the taste av whisky intirely I am."

"Gollie, am dat so? Fo' de land sakes, am youse got de same complaint what am keepin' dis coon erwake nights? I'se done dream fo' de last week dat somebody done rented out de inside ob me fo' a lime kiln," replied Pomp, sympathetically.

"I done jined de Saloon-Keepers' Temperance Union fo' I left Readestown, but dat don't bar out nuffin' 'septin' water," added the darky.

"Then begob ye are saved. Whist! Lend me your ears."

"No, sah. I se got use fo' em meself."

"Faith an' I mane—listen til me."

"Dat's all right. I se doin' it."

"Well. Be the powers av turvt, now is our toime for a bit av a spree."

"I'm wid yer. But we muss keep clear of Mars Frank."

"Why don't yez tell me something new, bedad."

"I'se got some shirts to git washed, an' I'll took um wid me."

"An' yez can lave them wid some heathen Chinese."

"Dat's what I thought. I se gwine ter git dat wash ready, an' den we'll start out as fust-class artists."

"Yes, in red paint."

"An' we's er gwine ter fresco de town."

"You bet on that sure. Begorra Chicago is a foine bit av a town for a lark I've heard say."

A few moments later Pomp and Barney were on State street, and the darky carried a bundle containing his wash under his arm.

They struck east to Clark street, where is situated the "Bowery" of Chicago.

Presently they sighted a Chinese laundry and entered it.

The Mongolian received the shirts from Pomp and said:

"Me hab shirty all yeddy by two hours, hot and dried, sahe ail same?"

"Das all right. I se gwine to come fo' dem shirts fo' night," replied Pomp.

"Begob an' if yez haven't thim ready, sure an' there'll be a dead heathen in the town," admonished Barney.

"Irishee manee no good—so muchee talkee," responded the Celestial.

Barney was a going to have a "bit av a ruction" with him, but Pomp interposed, saying:

"Das all right. I want my shirts, an' so doan' go fer de yellor nigger."

"Begob it's only to oblige ye, me gossoon, that I let the hathem off. Be the powers of turf, the day has not come for a Chinaman to insult a gentleman from the old sod," said Barney, and he reluctantly left the laundry with Pomp.

There was a saloon in sight. In fact there were a dozen of them. But Barney and Pomp had no choice among them, so they entered the nearest one and proceeded to "fill up" as speedily as possible.

About two hours later two decidedly jolly individuals might have been seen tracing zig-zags on the sidewalk down Clark street.

It goes without saying that they were Barney and Pomp, and occasionally the Irishman would let out a shout that would have been a credit to Harrison, "the boy preacher," at one hundred dollars a week.

They were full of the "spirit," too—chuck full and running over. And it was Chicago spirits at that.

Soon they reached the laundry where Pomp had left his shirts.

They surged into it in a decidedly breezy, free-and-easy way and demanded the shirts.

Those garments were ready.

The presiding genius of the shop said so, and carelessly handed a bundle to Pomp, which he took from a great heap on the counter.

Pomp paid the bill and carrying the bundle by the string, swinging it at his side as he walked, departed with Barney.

At the door the Chinaman's dog, a yellow mongrel, that looked like a good subject for the anatomical department of a museum of natural history, lay sunning himself as Pomp and Barney passed out.

The cur sniffed as if he scented something to eat.

And so he did. By mistake the Chinaman had given Pomp a package of stale meat instead of his shirts.

The dog got up and followed the meat and Pomp and Barney.

It had been a period of many, many moons since that sunflower-colored canine had devoured a square meal.

Evidently the cur meant now to improve his opportunity for he drew nearer and nearer to Pomp.

Then suddenly he made a spring, his teeth met in the package of meat and away he ran with it back toward his master's laundry.

"Golly, dat yellor nigger hab sent his dorg ter steal my shirts!" cried Pomp.

"Begob, that's so!" assented Barney. "An' now we'll go for the hathem and bate the head av him! Sure, an' it's a mane trick on strangers!"

Then Pomp and Barney started back for the laundry, into which the yellow cur had darted with his prize.

The two hilarious comrades dashed tumultuously into the laundry a few seconds later.

"Whoop—whoop!" cried Barney.

"Hi, yil!" shouted Pomp, and they went for the Chinaman.

He had not kept a laundry on Clark street in Chicago, however, several years for naught, and he raised his ironing-board and smashed Barney over the head with it.

The yellow cur dropped the meat, and took a hand in the row that ensued, and in less than a second, darky, Irishman, Chinaman and yellow cur were badly mixed.

But a couple of stalwart Dutch policeman, each having a capacity for four glasses of beer, appeared upon the scene as it was becoming interesting, and separated the contending parties.

Pomp and Barney would have been arrested, but just then Frank Reade and Captain Archer most opportunely happened along, and the young inventor persuaded the Dutch policeman to let his faithful followers off.

Frank's argument was a resistless one. It took the form of a five-dollar note.

The inventor marched Pomp and Barney to the Queen Clipper and looked to it they did not leave the vessel again.

The next day the aerial craft was gotten underway and the voyage for the Arctic seas was begun.

Thrilling adventures were to ensue, and a strange mystery of good Doctor Vaneyke's life, which was

a secret he had kept even from Frank Reade, was to be developed.

We may pass over the events of the voyage until the air vessel was over Behring's Straits. Then an incident to be recorded transpired.

A keg was discovered floating in the sea. Through a telescope Frank sighted the drifting object and he determined to secure it. He was on the eve of a discovery.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ANOTHER MESSAGE FROM THE ARCTIC SEA—CAUGHT IN A BLIZZARD.

SOME difficulty was experienced by Frank in securing the keg which had been discovered floating in Behring's Strait.

The Queen Clipper was lowered almost to the water's surface, for the sea was calm and there was no wind.

The drifting keg was finally harpooned with a boat-hook and drawn up on the deck of the vessel by Barney and Pomp.

"Sure an' it's empty. Faith, I can tell that be the weight, an' begob it's disappointed I am," said Barney as he and the darky pulled the keg on deck.

"Gollie, I see mighty put out myself," assented Pomp.

"Begob, it's a whisky keg, an' I was aither thinkin' it might be full av the old stuff. But no such good luck, sure," replied Barney ruefully.

"Das so. Here she am!"

"All together! as the ould woman said whin the house fell on the whole family, bedad!" cried Barney.

Another strong pull and the keg was on deck.

The keg was then seen to be a strong oaken one, bound about with iron hoops, and observing it closely, Captain Archer said, in tones of excitement:

"As I live, this keg corresponds almost exactly with the description given me of the one picked up off the coast of Alaska, and containing my unfortunate brother's message from the Arctic Sea."

"Is it possible! Then let us open and examine the contents of the keg, if such there be," replied Frank.

Barney brought an ax from the tool-room, and under his powerful blow the head of the cask was soon broken in.

At first, as he looked into it, Frank thought the cask was empty. But a second glance revealed that such was not the fact.

Frank then caught sight of a dark square object at the bottom of the cask. Drawing it up it proved to be a package wrapped carefully in oilsilk, and bound with wire.

The covering was removed, and a small wooden box was disclosed.

Inside of this a letter was found.

Captain Archer uttered a cry of delight as he read the following inscription on the letter:

"To CAPTAIN FREDERICK ARCHER, U. S. A., or any one who may rescue this keg from the sea."

Eagerly Captain Archer read the letter, which proved to be another message from the captive of the icebound Arctic Sea.

The letter, which Captain Archer read aloud, ran as follows:

I write this to inform the world beyond the Arctic sea of the situation of the brig Endurance and her crew. We are completely ice-bound on the coast of Siberia, in about seventy degrees north latitude. Our provisions are nearly exhausted, but we have a large supply of alcoholic drinks left which may yet prove our destruction. Hostile natives are near, and there is a camp of convicts in the neighborhood. The latter may discover us, and at this moment I am in fear that they have done so. In case we are attacked, my men can scarcely defend the brig. The brandy and whisky will be a strong temptation to the convicts, and besides, our brig contains all the articles the convicts naturally covet. This keg I shall set adrift in an open channel scarcely large enough for a small boat, but through which a strong current runs southward. It is impossible for us to make our way southward overland without, in all probability, meeting the fate of the men of the Jeannette, who perished in such an attempt.

"For God's sake send us assistance.

"RICHARD ARCHER, captain of the brig ENDURANCE."

"Heavens! My poor brother! What a situation of peril! The perils in his case are greater than those which ordinarily menace Arctic explorers similarly unfortunate. He has to dread evil men as well as the perils of nature," said Captain Fred, feelingly, as he concluded the reading of the letter.

"True, true; and this message inspires me to make even greater speed than we have yet attained," responded Frank.

Captain Archer regarded his friend a trifle incredulously.

And he said:

"Is it possible that I have not seen the Queen Clipper at her best in point of speed yet?"

"Certainly. Since you came on board we have never ran faster than eighty knots an hour."

"Heavens! that is equal to steam engine speed."

"True. I don't want to appear boastful, but my air-ship completely eclipses the steam engine in point of speed."

"I am ready to believe anything of this wonder of the air."

"Even that she can make one hundred and twenty knots an hour?"

"Yes, if you say so."

"Well, we shall see."

Thus speaking, Frank glanced at the dial of the speed indicator, and he added:

"We are now making about seventy knots an hour. Wait until we begin to race."

Then he gave the necessary order, and the full electric currents were turned on to the machinery.

The air-vessel fairly shot forward.

Frank and his companions could scarcely keep their feet as they clung to the rail.

"Look at the dial now," said Frank, a moment or so after full speed had been attained.

Captain Archer did so.

"As I live, the hand on the dial has gained ten points!" he exclaimed.

"Each point equals four knots fractionally. The dial gives the speed per moment. But we will not continue as fast as this. I do not care to reach the north pole, and presently we shall go tacking about and keep a bright lookout for your brother's ship," said Frank.

The speed was moderated to 90 knots.

This was maintained until the vessel of the air had gone a long distance. Then the speed was further checked.

The air-ship was tacked along the desert waste of snow and ice that comprises the shore of Russia's frozen lands.

The Arctic ocean was full of drifting icebergs here, and further north there were great floes.

The air-ship coasted on and on northward.

Soon the sea showed a ragged, icy surface, broken here and there by chasms and narrow rifts, suggesting the perils of attempting to travel over it.

Afar a range of hills became visible to the westward toward nightfall.

And having inspected them by the aid of his glass, Frank decided to sail toward them, as the letter Captain Archer had received from his brother while at the fort mentioned certain rocky hills.

For an hour or so snow had been falling. But only a slight storm had it as yet become.

The course of the air-ship was changed, and it proceeded toward the icy hills.

The distance proved greater than Frank anticipated, and night was darkening the sky before the hills were reached.

The snow storm, too, had increased materially in violence.

As darkness fell what had been but a gentle snow fall in the beginning was a veritable blizzard.

The snow became like fine sand, and blew in whirls and eddies, which kept the snow in the air, and rendered it impossible to tell which way the wind was really coming from.

Frank turned his back to it and found that he was still facing it. It was bewildering. It was as different from an ordinary snow storm as a cyclone is different from a summer's breeze.

The snow got into the eyes and noses of those who exposed themselves on deck.

Frank consulted the compass to keep his course. The lookout could not see a yard ahead. Had there been mountains near the danger would have been great.

The speed was slackened, until the vessel only moved like a road wagon—no faster.

But a considerable elevation was maintained.

The storm increased as the night advanced, and the young inventor presently observed that the influence of a polar attraction was at work on the needle of the compass. It vibrated uncertainly.

Frank watched it for a time, and then he decided that it could no longer be implicitly relied upon, so he said to the doctor and Captain Archer:

"We have no certain means of guiding the Queen Clipper now. The compass has failed."

"And if the storm continues we may drift we know not whither," said the doctor, uneasily.

"Yes. But I'll try to go southward."

"Over Siberian Russia—the land of inhumanity!" replied the doctor.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE DOCTOR'S SECRET REVEALED—THE BLOOD-HOUNDS OF SIBERIA.

THERE was an intonation of the most intense bitterness in Doctor Vaneyke's voice as he last spoke.

Frank and Captain Archer noticed it, and the my calculations?" said Frank, as he and his com-

was dear to his old friend had suffered through the inhumanity of Russian law.

But the young inventor did not question the doctor. He was aware that the old scientist had always been reticent regarding his career in the old world.

Frank felt somewhat delicate about questioning him, therefore, and yet as he saw the peculiar stern expression that had come upon his friend's kindly face, he felt that he had some good and powerful reason for speaking powerfully, feelingly of Russian inhumanity.

The young inventor's reading had informed him that the Russian government was the most cruel and oppressive in the known world.

Mentally he said:

"At some period of his life my old friend himself may have felt the cruel injustice of Russian law personally. He is a Prussian by birth, but he may have resided in Russia."

This seemed probable to Frank, for he knew that Dr. Vaneyke had been a great traveler.

The night wore slowly on.

The Queen Clipper drifted slowly through the falling snow, and the blizzard continued.

No one on board the air-ship slept that night. Each and every one was too anxious—to solicitous for the safety of the vessel to do so.

There was something suspenseful and trying to the strongest nerves, in thus drifting through space with no knowledge where they were and in complete ignorance of what each succeeding moment might bring forth.

The experience was a particularly trying one for Captain Archer.

He was a brave man, but he had not as yet gained the experience possessed by his comrades in aerial voyaging.

Familiarity, even with danger, is a source of confidence, and so the soldier who could face bullets was not as cool now as Frank and the doctor.

But the longest night must have an end, and while the snow still fell, though the blizzard had spent its force, the sun arose.

Through the falling flakes the men of the air ship saw the country below them. The Arctic sea was no longer in sight. Instead a rugged land snow-clad, with dark evergreen forests here and there, could be seen.

"Where are we?" exclaimed Captain Archer, as he went on deck with Frank and the doctor.

"Over Siberia," replied the latter, with singular promptitude.

"I think you are right, doctor. But as the sun is just now on the horizon, I'll take an observation and calculate our position. Just as we came on deck I noticed the compass. It was no longer uncertain. We are beyond the influence of the polar attraction at all events," answered Frank.

Leaving the doctor and Captain Archer in conversation, he went below, and with his nautical instruments proceeded to calculate the position of the air-ship.

The result was proof of the correctness of the doctor's judgment. Frank found that the Queen Clipper was really over north-eastern Siberia.

"I wonder if it can be possible that the doctor recognized the scenery?" Frank asked himself.

Having concluded his calculation with certitude, and to his entire satisfaction, he joined Captain Archer and the doctor on deck.

"We will make a landing!" said Frank, presently, after he had announced that the doctor was correct when he said, they were over Siberia.

"For what purpose will you land?" asked the doctor.

"Why, I've sighted some small game at the edge of the wood, through my glass; I think we shall have no difficulty in securing some. It would prove most acceptable, I am sure," replied Frank.

"So it would," assented Captain Archer.

But the doctor said no more, then. Frank laid down his glass and presently Dr. Vaneyke took it up and surveyed the country in every direction with long and searching glance.

He saw no living thing.

With an expression of relief the doctor finally put aside the glass. Meanwhile the ship was floating earthward, for Frank had issued orders to the engineer to make a landing.

The air-vessel reached the earth at the confines of a snowy forest of evergreen trees.

Frank, Captain Archer and Barney took their guns and set out in search of game.

Dr. Vaneyke was invited to accompany the party, but he declined so to do.

Frank and his companions struck into the woods, and presently they came upon a road which was covered with the hoof-prints of shod horses.

The inventor and his companions were very much surprised.

"It must be that we are further south than I thought for. Can it be that I made a mistake in

my calculations?" said Frank, as he and his com-

"It would almost seem so," assented the captain.

"Begob an' do they sell a bit av the ould stuff in this heathen country? Sure it's hopin' they do I am," said Barney.

Then Frank led the way along the road in the forest, for he thought it might lead to some human habitation near at hand.

But the hunters from the Queen Clipper had not gone far when they heard a rifle shot from the direction of the air-ship.

"Begob that's Pomp's gun!" cried Barney.

As he spoke, fierce shouts uttered in strange hoarse voices were heard.

These sounds also emanated from the direction of the Queen Clipper.

"There is trouble at the air-ship of some kind!" cried Frank.

"Right!" exclaimed Captain Archer.

"At begob it's back we had better go on the double quick," advised Barney.

"Yes," assented Frank, and turning he led the way toward the Queen Clipper at full speed.

Barney and Captain Archer ran too, and in a few moments they burst out of the timber in sight of the aeronef.

Then Frank and his two comrades beheld a thrilling and surprising scene.

The Queen Clipper was surrounded by a band of mounted men, who wore fur coats, tall caps, and were armed with carbines and revolvers.

They were all swarthy fellows, and one glance caused Frank to decide as to who and what they were.

"Cossacks! The guards of the Siberian prison lands! The Czar's blood hounds!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. See, one fellow has a star on his breast. He is a captain of the Cossacks," said the American soldier.

"No doubt. But see, they are dismounting. It looks as if they were getting ready to charge on the air-ship," replied Frank.

As yet the Cossacks, for such they were, had not seen Frank and his friends.

Just then the officer in command of the Cossacks rode near the air-ship, and called out in bad English:

"We have seen Carl Vaneyke—a former prisoner of the mines who escaped from my charge ten years ago, and fled from Russia. He is on board your flying machine, and we demand his surrender in the name of the Czar, for he is now on Russian territory!"

Frank and his companions were astounded.

"Ha! now I understand the doctor's bitterness in speaking of Russian inhumanity. Good Heaven! he is an escaped exile, and I never dreamed of such a thing," said Frank.

But he knew that the purest, best and wisest men are often sent to the prison-mines of Siberia because they do not approve of the awful slavery in which the masses are held in the dread land of the Romanoffs.

So Frank exclaimed:

"They shall not arrest my noble old friend. We will save him!"

"I am with you for that purpose, to the death. The doctor is now an American citizen, but that will not help him, for the pusillanimous policy of our government in not protecting her citizens abroad has made the United States a laughing stock for the powers of Europe," replied Captain Archer, warmly.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE COSSACKS—A BATTLE ON DECK—THE DOCTOR KIDNAPPED.

"Is it a ruction? Faith, an' if the blackguards av the world laves a hand on the good ould doctor, it's himself, Barney O'Shea, that will make cold meat av the spaldeen!" said the Irishman.

"Forward!" cried Frank.

Then all three made a dash for the air-ship. As they ran toward it, Doctor Vaneyke, standing on the deck, answered the Cossack officer, saying:

"I have become a naturalized American citizen. I refuse to surrender to you brutal wretches or any representative of your inhuman master."

"Treason!" thundered the Cossack.

"No. The truth. But that is treason in Russia. Listen. I am guilty of no crime. Simply because I dared to openly deplore the condition of hopeless slavery, which is the fate of the common people of Russia. I was condemned to the prison-mine. I'll never be taken back to it alive!"

The attention of all the Cossacks was given to the doctor. Their backs were turned to Frank and his comrades.

So the young inventor and his two friends came close to the band without being discovered by them.

Suddenly they darted by the Cossacks.

The captain of the swarthy prison guards ap-

peared to take it for granted that the rush made by Frank and his companions meant an attempt to render the doctor assistance.

The Muscovite shouted some order in Russian as he beheld the young inventor, and his men started in pursuit of him and his friends.

Frank saw that, as the Cossacks were well mounted, whereas he and his companions were on foot, they were likely to be run down.

So he suddenly halted, and, wheeling like a flash, opened fire upon his pursuers from his repeating rifle.

He did not aim to hit, but only sought to check the Cossacks' pursuit.

In this he succeeded.

The Cossacks halted as the young American's bullets went singing over their heads. The Cossacks were about to return Frank's shots, and some of them had leveled their carbines, when the officer shouted an order in Russian that restrained them.

Frank presumed the Cossack chief had told his men that he desired to take the strangers prisoners.

In a moment more the young inventor reached the air-ship, and ran up the ladder to the deck of it. Barney and Captain Archer followed him.

But as the commander of the Queen Clipper found himself once again upon her deck, the Cossacks dashed up, flung themselves from their trained horses, and, urged on by their leader, made a charge to reach the deck.

They swarmed up the propellers, fore and aft, and in a trice half their number were on deck.

But the crew had sprang to arms before Frank reached the deck, and the Cossacks met a warm reception as they boarded the vessel.

Dr. Vaneyke dropped a swarthy rascal who was making at him, and it seemed that the bullet from the doctor's weapon had crashed through the rascal's head.

He lay motionless where he had fallen.

And a desperate fight ensued on the deck.

"Whoop! Ireland and Donnybrook forever!" yelled Barney, fighting like mad side by side with Pomp.

The desperate valor of the Americans soon proved too much for the Cossacks, though they outnumbered the defenders of the air-ship, and the swarthy rascals were driven overboard in confusion.

Then, before they could rally for a new attack the air-ship was gotten under way.

Swiftly she arose into the air while the astonished Cossacks looked on in bewilderment.

"Good-by, ye blackguards! Whin yez want to kidnap an American gentleman agin sind us yer keerd!" shouted Barney derisively.

And the good ship of the air sailed majestically away.

The bodies of the Cossacks, who had fallen on the deck, were thrown overboard and the deck was cleared.

"Well, we are well clear of your enemies now, doctor," said Frank, grasping his old friend's hand.

Little did the young inventor think that this was not so. Yet such was the reality.

The man whom the doctor had brought down with his pistol shot had only been stunned. The bullet had only grazed the fellow's head.

He had regained his senses, as the ship of the air sailed upward.

Seeing that he could not escape, the cunning rascal, who was really a spy of the secret police of Russia, crept unseen down the companion way, and concealed himself.

He was on board after all the bodies were hurled from the deck.

There had been a large reward offered for the capture of Doctor Vaneyke at the time of his escape.

The Cossack knew that reward offer still held good.

When he had concealed himself he began to reflect and plot to kidnap the good doctor, and secretly take him away from among his friends, and return him to the mines, so as to obtain the troubles he coveted.

The course of the air-ship was set for the Arctic ocean again.

Then Frank and the doctor had a long conversation.

The latter related to his young friend all the story of his arrest and imprisonment in Russia, and how he had finally escaped and reached the United States, where he had since dwelt.

But we need not repeat this narrative, as similar experiences have frequently been recorded in narratives of Russia.

The supply of water needed replenishing, as Frank found presently upon testing the tank, at Pomp's request, for the darky had found it difficult to draw the water he needed for cooking purposes.

A frozen stream was sighted as night came on,

and it was decided to descend and bore the ice for water.

The vessel made a landing on the bank of the frozen stream, and a great ice auger and accompanying machinery for driving it, by means of electricity from the battery of the Queen Clipper, was placed in position.

Frank experienced some difficulty in getting the iceberg machine in working order, and when he at last had it working well darkness had fallen.

And as the sky was overcast the gloom was complete.

But by the light of the electric light which was made to send forth its rays on the deserted side of the vessel, the boring was continued.

All hands save Dr. Vaneyke were on the ice.

The doctor had received a heavy blow on the head during the fight with the Cossacks, and he was now suffering from the resultant head-ache. So he had retired to his cabin.

The doctor was reclining on a couch when all at once the cabin door opened, and in glided the Cossack spy who had concealed himself in the hold.

The Muscovite held a leveled revolver in his hand and the weapon was at a full cock. His fierce black eyes blazed ominously as he presented the weapon at the doctor's head and hissed:

"Surrender! Not a word, or a sound, or a fire!"

The doctor was completely surprised. He knew the Cossack would send a bullet through his head if he showed fight.

So he made no movement looking to resistance. The Cossack placed the muzzle of his weapon against the back of the doctor's head, and marched him on deck, and thence down a landing ladder, to the ground, on the side of the Queen Clipper opposite to that on which Frank and the others were at work.

There was a fringe of trees along the bank between the stream and the Queen Clipper, so Frank and his friends did not see what took place on the deck.

Having reached the ground with his prisoner, the Cossack deftly snapped a pair of Russian manacles on his wrists, and, still keeping his revolver at the unfortunate man's head, marched him into an adjacent woods, and then struck southward for the nearest prison-mines.

Having secured water Frank and the others returned to the air vessel. Then the young inventor discovered the doctor's absence. In alarm he caused a search to be made, and the trail made by the old scientist and his kidnapper was found. The peculiar tracks made by the Cossack told Frank what he was, and the inventor knew then that the old doctor was a captive.

"I'll rescue my old friend or die!" voiced the young American.

CHAPTER LXVII.

TRACKING THE COSSACKS—AGAIN BOUND NORTHWARD.

THE trail left in the snow by Doctor Vaneyke and his Cossack kidnapper was a plain one, and Frank determined to follow it forthwith.

The fate of the good doctor clearly depended upon Frank overtaking him and his captor before they reached the prison-mines or joined the Cossack's band.

Captain Archer volunteered to take the snow-trail, and he said:

"My experience in tracking redskins in the far West, where I have recently seen several years service, will now prove of advantage, perhaps, in following the doctor."

It was quickly arranged that while Captain Archer and Barney followed the trail on foot and acted as guide for the air-ship, Frank and the others should make the pursuit on board the Queen Clipper.

The necessity for this division of the rescuers was apparent at the outset, for the trail could not be kept in sight from the deck of the vessel, particularly after it entered the snow-clad forest.

Captain Archer was provided with a small masked lantern, and a code of signals to be made by means of it were hastily agreed upon between him and Frank.

There were but a few moments of necessary delay, and then the doctor's friends took his trail.

Following the light of the captain's lantern, Frank directed the course of the aerial vessel. Like a star gleamed the brilliant little light moving steadily onward through the gloomy Siberian woods.

Captain Archer and Barney traveled as rapidly as possible, for the incentive which actuated them was sufficiently powerful to make them desirous of attaining the greatest speed.

The woods proved to be somewhat open. It was, in fact, almost destitute of undergrowth, and as the doctor's captor had made his trail through the most clear, easily traversed recesses, Captain

and his companion experienced no difficulty in getting to the same. Their trail led steadily southward, and some versts had been traversed by the tracks on the earth and the trailers of the air on the Queen Clipper, when Captain Archer suddenly halted.

He had caught a glimpse of a light ahead.

At the same time Barney saw it, and he said in low tones:

"Begob, is it a camp-fire yonder, I dunno?"

"I suspect so. Possibly the fire marks the site of a Cossack encampment. The bronzed scouts of the Czar's prison country often make long journeys into the wildest portions of Siberia in search of escaping exiles."

"An' if it's a camp-fire ay the blackguards we see ahead, sure the docther is there be this toime."

"Yes, probably the kidnapper has joined his band with his prisoner."

"Then it's a bit av a ruction we'll have to rescue the poor mon, sure, I'm thinkin'."

"Possibly. But I fear we can only hope to save the doctor by some stratagem."

"Have yez anything in moind, I dunno?"

"Wait, I'll give Frank Reade the light signal to lay too, and then we will make a good scout forward and determine positively regarding the light ahead."

Then Captain Archer drew the slide on the masked lantern backward and forward three times, after which he and Barney set out stealthily on the trail again.

It led them straight toward the light they had discovered, and they were very soon near enough to determine that it was caused by a blazing campfire kindled in a sheltered dell.

A score and more of dark forms were moving about the camp-fire, and Captain Archer and Barney were presently close enough to see that they were Cossacks.

And Dr. Vaneyke was also discovered bound to a tree where his captors had secured him.

Captain Archer and Barney were watching the Cossacks from behind some dense snow-laden bushes, while the mask hid the light of their lantern, when an incident occurred that occasioned consternation among the doctor's captors.

In winter the Siberian bear, which is one of the largest and most ferocious animals known, often becomes maddened by famine, and then it hesitates not to attack man. Instances are recorded where a company of starving bears have boldly ventured into Siberian villages and tried to force their way into the huts of the peasants.

There suddenly came a series of roars from the further side of the Cossack camp, and the succeeding moment six monster bears, drawn to the camp by the scent of food, rushed into the fire-light and made for the supper which the Cossacks were, it seemed, just then engaged in cooking.

The Cossacks scattered in all directions.

They had staked arms, and only a few of them retained sufficient presence of mind to secure their weapons before they sprang to cover.

"Now is our time, begob," exclaimed Barney.

"Yes, come on," assented Captain Archer, and he and the brave Irishman went forward swiftly, and in a moment they reached the tree to which Dr. Vaneyke was bound.

Until that moment the bears seemed not to have seen the Cossacks' prisoner. The famishing brutes had stopped to devour the food of the Cossacks.

As Captain Archer and Barney reached the tree to which the doctor was bound, the bears discovered them and the captive.

Then the whole six monsters of the Siberian forests came at the Americans, uttering fierce and terrible growls, and showing their gleaming white fangs.

And then the Cossacks too saw the rescuers, and they were menaced by double danger.

While the bears came trotting at them such of the Cossacks as had secured their carbines before they fled from the bears rallied and sent a volley of shot at the Americans.

But the bullets failed to hit either one of the devoted trio, and slashing away with his knife, Captain Archer severed the doctor's bonds, while Barney blazed away at the Cossacks with a revolver in each hand.

The revolvers Barney used were Frank Reade's weapons, and the owner had given them to Barney to carry that night, because they had a peculiar sharp report which could not be mistaken, and it was agreed that the discharge of those weapons should be a signal to bring the Queen Clipper on the scene.

The instant the doctor was free he and his friends darted away. The Cossacks, for the time, had enough to do to defend themselves against the bears.

Those animals now again charged upon the doc-

tor's recent captors.

Running at full speed, the doctor and his friends made a swift detour and came upon the trail the

captain and Barney had followed to the Cossack camp.

They had gained some distance from the position of their enemies, when the captain bethought himself of the lantern, and springing the slide, he waved the bull's-eye about his head.

Just then, in answer to the shots from his revolvers which had been discharged by Barney, Frank Reade was advancing at full speed with the ship toward the scene of the fight at the Cossack camp.

He saw the lantern signal, and at once issued the necessary orders to slow up.

As soon as the ship of the sky was stopped, a descent was made. Meantime the doctor and his friends had sighted the Queen Clipper through an opening in the trees.

The vessel soon reached the earth in an interglade, and the doctor and his friends hastened toward it.

But just then the Cossacks, who had now mounted their horses, which had been picketed in a ravine near their camp, came charging through the woods in pursuit of the man they claimed as an escaped exile.

But the doctor and his friends, running as for their lives, gained the Queen Clipper and climbed to the deck before the pursuers came up.

Then the Cossacks' charge was met by a volley from the weapons of the Americans, and the ship of the air arose and sailed away northward, leaving the Cossacks to gnash their teeth in rage and disappointment.

The doctor told how he had been captured, and in conclusion he added:

"On the morrow my captors meant to march me to the prison mines, and once the iron doors of that underground tomb had closed upon me again, I might have well lost all hope of ever again seeing the light of day. A prisoner who, having once escaped, is recaptured, is thereafter always doubly guarded."

The doctor thanked his friends feelingly for their assistance, and then he sought the repose of which he stood in much need after his recent exciting experiences.

The course of the Queen Clipper continued to be due north.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE SHIP IN THE ICE—THE RUSSIAN CONVICTS.

DAYLIGHT disclosed the frozen waters of the Arctic sea to the crew of the aeronef, and toward mid-day the lookout shouted:

"A ship! A ship!"

Frank was on deck and he instantly seized his glass, and through it saw the masts of a vessel in the distance, that seemed to rise directly out of the ice.

All speed was made toward the ship, and all hands felt almost positive that the vessel they were in search of was at last discovered.

Soon the Queen Clipper made the distance that intervened between it and the ice-bound vessel.

Looking down upon it all hands saw that it was a brig, and, moreover, almost at once it was seen that it was the Endurance.

That name was painted on the bows.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Found at last!" cried Captain Archer.

The deck of the vessel in the ice had been roofed over with tarpaulin, and it seemed every possible preparation seemed to have been made to keep out the cold.

Smoke was seen ascending from a pipe in the tarpaulin deck-roof, and presently as "The Queen Clipper" descended beside the brig a man appeared through the roof of the deck.

Only his head and shoulders were visible, as he inspected "The Queen Clipper" in evident amazement.

But the army officer on board the air vessel recognized his brother, Richard Archer.

"Dick! Dick!" he shouted, waving his fur cap. "Don't you know me? I'm your brother Fred!"

"Fred! Oh, thank heaven! Thank heaven!" shouted back the Arctic captive. "Yes, it is indeed you. And you have come to the rescue!"

"Yes, yes. In my friend Frank Reade's ship. A vessel surpassing all other means of locomotion as yet known to the world."

The Queen Clipper made a landing on the ice close beside the brig at once.

Meantime the crew of that ice-bound vessel came out on the ice, and a terrible sight they presented. Their faces were white, drawn and pinched.

The privations they had suffered were visible on each man's features, and they begged piteously for food.

"Yes," said Captain Richard Archer of the Arctic brig, as he and his brother met and embraced on the ice between the two vessels. "my men are starving. For twenty days we have had no food save a few moldy ship's biscuit."

"They shall starve no longer. We have food for

all. Thank God we have come in time. Come on board the Queen Clipper, and my men and I will find pleasure in ministering to all your wants," cried Frank.

His noble nature was moved with commiseration. He pitied the poor Arctic seamen from his heart.

The crew of the brig came on board the airship at once in response to Frank's invitation.

Then he had a feast prepared for them. But care was taken, under Dr. Vaneyke's directions, not to allow the starving seamen to eat too much.

Meanwhile Captain Richard Archer told the story of the voyage of the Endurance.

But the narrative presented no remarkable features, and therefore we will pass over the most of it.

One point only need to be mentioned, and that is that Captain Archer related that his second mate, one Nick Cook, has deserted the ship. Cook was a drinking man, and in drunken fury he had murdered a sailor. To escape the consequences of his crime he had deserted the vessel, vowing vengeance upon Captain Archer who had determined to have him punished for his crime.

As we have learned from the letters from Captain Archer of the brig, a camp of convicts was near.

And there were hostile natives in the neighborhood.

Referring to the letters he had received, Fred Archer questioned his brother about the convicts, and the hostile Arctic tribe.

"When out hunting, some time before he killed the sailor in his drunken frenzy, Cook and I discovered a camp of white men, clad in Russian costume, among the icy hills to the southward. We got near enough to overhear some of the conversations of the strangers, as I have some knowledge of Russian, and gained sufficient information from the strangers to know they were escaped convicts from the prison mines," stated the captain of the brig.

"Wrongs patriots, perhaps," said Frank, thinking of the doctor.

"No. From what the men said I concluded that they were desperate criminals, murderers, robbers. In short the worst class of Siberian exiles."

"That may be true," said the doctor, "for it is one of the most inhuman features of the Russian prison system that political exiles, and refined, educated persons, guilty of no crime, are sent to the same prison mines as are the most brutal murderers and malefactors of the lowest kind."

"Well, I now believe that Cook means to bring the Russian criminals to capture and plunder the brig," continued Richard Archer.

"How long has the villain been gone?" asked Frank.

"He has been absent from the brig scarcely twenty-four hours."

"Then if he means to lead the convicts to attack it he will soon return, I presume."

"Yes, for it is only ten miles to the convicts' camp."

"Well, if the assassin comes now he will meet with a reception he does not count on."

"There was some further conversation, and as it was evident the Endurance could not be gotten off the ice, it was determined to desert her."

Though it was yet warm, pleasant fall weather in the United States, whence the Queen Clipper had so recently come, in that far Arctic sea, near the north pole, winter had already set in.

It was decided that the crew of the Endurance should be carried to the United States on board the Queen Clipper. The addition of their weight would not materially interfere with the speed of the vessel, and she was strong enough to carry many more persons than the crew of the brig, beside her own hands.

Arrangements were at once made to transfer the most valuable belongings of the brig on board the Queen Clipper, and this was soon done.

But before the work was completed there came an alarm from the lookout.

He reported moving forms of men in the direction of the hills, and inspecting them through his glass, Frank declared them a band of thirty odd Russians, all well armed.

As they drew near Frank handed the glass to the captain of the ice bound brig, and as soon as he looked at the approaching party he said:

"They are the Russian convicts, and Cook is in the lead of them. There can be no question as to their purpose. They are surely coming to attack us."

Frank issued orders for all hands to get on board the Queen Clipper. Then arms and ammunition was served out, and the young inventor said:

"We might sail away now, but I'll teach those rascals a lesson first. Is there anything of much value left on board of the brig yet?"

"No. Nothing save the powder in the magazine. You know Arctic exploring vessels always carry a supply of powder to use in blasting away ice."

What spirits have not been put aboard your vessel have been allowed to go to waste. The casks have been opened and dumped," replied the captain of the brig.

"Good! We will give the approaching rascals a warm reception, and then sail away," said Frank.

Barney and Pomp heard his words, and they were delighted.

"It's a ruction we'll have, nagur. Oh, begob, I want to git mesel' in practice for it!" said Barney, suddenly giving Pomp a poke in the ribs.

The Irishman dodged like a flash, thinking to escape a return blow. But Pomp was too quick for him.

He caught Barney a back-handed smash across the mouth.

"Golly, I want fer to git in practice, too!" cried Pomp, grinning.

"An' do yez take me for a sand-bag for yez to be thumpin' av?" roared Barney.

"Youse done hit me first, Irish."

"That's all right, begob! Do yez think an Irishman will wait for a nagur to strike first?"

"But we weren't fightin'. Golly, no sah!"

"An' ye hit me in the jaw!"

"You hit dis chile below de belt!"

"That's foightin', begob! If it ain't enough for yez, take that!" and Barney, determined on a ruction, aimed a blow at Pomp's head. But like a flash the darky ducked and butted.

Barney went over on his back.

"I reckon dat am fightin'," said Pomp.

CHAPTER LXIX.

. TERRIBLE EXPLOSION—THE QUEEN CLIPPER DISABLED—FOES AT HAND.

BUT at that moment a terrible explosion occurred. The powder in the magazine of the ice-bound brig had taken fire from some unknown cause.

The detonation was terrific, but no one was injured.

It shook the icy surface all around, and the brig was blown to fragments, while red flames shot upward in lurid waves amid a canopy of dense black smoke.

And as the sound of the terrible explosion yet rang in the air, there came a crash at the stern of the Queen Clipper.

A section of the iron hull of the brig had been hurled away by the explosion, and it had struck the stern propeller and shattered it.

Another fragment cut away three of the suspensory masts, and they came down with a crash upon the deck.

A moment after the smoke of the explosion cleared away somewhat, Frank saw the extent of the damage the Queen Clipper had sustained.

There were other injuries besides those done to the stern propeller and the suspensory masts.

A heavy iron plate had shattered the window of the central cabin, and broken and bent the machinery there to such an extent that one glance assured Frank that it would be impossible to start the suspensory engine.

And meantime the convicts, led by the sailor assassin who had deserted the Endurance, were swiftly drawing nearer.

The brig was now destroyed, and naturally, therefore, the criminals might be expected to attempt the capture of the Queen Clipper in order to secure its cargo.

Frank and all hands understood that the situation had suddenly become one of intense and thrilling peril.

Now they could not hope to leave the scene of the explosion for some time. The suspensory engine, at least, would have to be repaired first.

Even without the stern propeller and the three shattered suspensory spars the Queen Clipper might be gotten afloat in the air again.

"We have got to fight for our lives now. If we are attacked by the convicts let every man do his duty. There is no chance for retreat until the suspensory engine is repaired," cried Frank.

"Captain Fred," he added, to the army officer, "I place you in command of the defenders of the Queen Clipper while myself and Sands set to work to repair the main engine."

"Very well, Frank, I'll do my best to merit your confidence," replied the young soldier.

Then, while Frank and Engineer Sands hastened into the central engine cabin and began work there without a moment's delay, Captain Fred Archer placed his men along the rail which was first barricaded with empty boxes and casks.

Barney and Pomp forgot all their recent row and in the excitement of the impending ruction they became as friendly as ever.

They got out a box of Frank's combination dynamite and nitro-glycerine torpedoes, and also loaded the cannon.

The crew was scattered along the rail on both sides of the deck. They were so placed in order

to repel an attack, even if it was made from both directions at the same time.

The Russian convicts, led by Cook, were soon within hailing distance of the air-ship. The sight of the wonderful vessel of the air seemed at first to completely astound them, as they gave it a near inspection.

But only for a moment or so did the convicts seem much impressed. Cook was seen to address them, and from his gestures the men of The Queen Clipper supposed he was explaining the real character of the aeronef to his more ignorant comrades.

The convicts had momentarily halted, but they now came on again.

Then Captain Archer shouted, as he saw the band was coming straight for the air-ship:

"Halt where you are!"

But the only answer he received was a series of derisive yells and insulting retorts.

And the voice of Cook rang out above his followers as he shouted:

"I swore I would return for vengeance, and here I am. I see Captain Archer, of the brig Endurance, on board your vessel. I'm after him—the man who meant to put me in irons, and send me to the gallows. Surrender, Archer, and then we'll talk about lettin' ye off. We see you are disabled, and at our mercy."

"Not much at your mercy, you murderous rascal, as you will find out, if you venture to attack us!" retorted Archer.

"We shall see. We outnumber you. We mean to make a desperate fight to get the supplies we need," cried Cook.

"Hal! So you acknowledge your purpose is one of plunder. And if you could induce me to surrender my brother, you would attack us just the same."

Cook saw that he had betrayed his plans. But he only uttered a fierce yell, and shouted to the convicts:

"Give 'em a volley, lads."

The convicts leveled their carbines and sent a volley of bullets at the air ship.

The crew of the aeronef returned the fire instantly, and several of the convicts fell.

Then they retreated out of gun-shot.

"Wait until it comes to close quarters wid them blackguards; thin it's a bit av diversion we'll be after givin' av them wid the torpedoes," said Barney.

"And the cannon. We may as well let the rascals know now that we have a big gun on board," said Captain Fred.

"Will it carry to where the rascals are now?" asked his brother.

"Yes," was the reply.

And then Barney and Pomp trained the cannon on the convicts, and as soon as they had secured a proper aim they discharged the gun.

"Dat was a surprise fo' dem white trash, boss," cried Pomp, as the shot from the cannon caused the convicts to retreat further away, while several were left behind, slain by the grape-shot from the big gun.

"The greatest peril will be at night. Then the rascals, under cover of the darkness, will make a more determined attack," said Captain Archer.

Just then his brother, who was looking through a telescope at the enemy, exclaimed:

"As I live, Fred, another large band of men are approaching from the South!"

It was so. The brother alternately looked through the glass, and saw that at least fifty men composed the coming party.

And they were a strange wild looking band of men dressed in furs, having long black hair, and armed with spears and guns.

Doctor Vaneyke was asked to look at the strangers, and after he had inspected them the old scientist and student said:

"They are Arctic natives, a wandering tribe akin to the Eskimos, very fierce and war-like and have never been conquered, though Russia has tried to extort tribute of furs from them."

"If they are fierce and war-like, they may attack the convicts and then us," said Captain Fred.

"No," replied the doctor, looking through the glass, "I see the convicts are making the Russian signals of friendship to the Arctic savages, and the latter return them. They have met before and are on friendly terms evidently."

"That is worse yet for us," replied Captain Fred. "For the savages and the convicts will no doubt unitedly attack us."

"I am sure you are right," assented the doctor, as the Arctic natives were presently seen to arrive at the halting place of the convicts and fraternize with them in the most amicable manner.

Some little time passed, and then the united forces of the convicts and the hostile natives began an advance toward the air-ship.

It was evident that a combined attack was now to be made by the enemy. Frank Reade had been apprised of the situation of affairs, and leaving his

work in the central cabin for a moment, he appeared on deck.

"I believe, Frank," said the old doctor seriously, "that we are now to be called upon to make the most desperate battle yet for our lives and our vessel of the air."

CHAPTER LXX.

THE CIRCLE OF DEATH—THE FIGHT FOR THE AIR-SHIP.

THE indications certainly were that the doctor was correct in his conjecture that the most desperate conflict yet known to the aerial voyagers must soon ensue.

Frank watched the advancing enemy for a moment before replying to the doctor's last remark. The thirty convicts, clothed in furs almost like the costumes of the Arctic savages, now led the van of the approaching band.

The fifty wild northern natives had evidently willingly allowed the convicts of the Siberian prison mines to lead the charge, and they were ready to support the men whose allies they had now become.

It was a desperate party who menaced the Queen Clipper. Every soul on board the air vessel knew that as well as Frank and the doctor.

"We can only do our best, doctor, and leave the issue to Him," said Frank, glancing heavenward. The young inventor now quickly issued some further orders, and in silence, but fully prepared for the fray, his crew awaited the onset.

Very soon the enemy advanced at a charge. They came on swiftly, and the Arctic savages made the ice-bound land ring with their wild, thrilling yells.

The convicts of the Siberian prison-mines uttered fierce cries, seemingly intent upon thus striking terror to the hearts of the brave defenders of the Queen Clipper.

The shades of night were now darkening over the scene, and Frank, all at once, shouted to Barney to turn on the electric light.

The Irishman at once obeyed the order, and the illumination of the Queen Clipper's wonderful light was flashed afar.

Upon the ice the white light glittered, sending forth a thousand reflections, transforming the scene, as with the wand of a magician, into a realm of diamond studded splendor.

The enemy halted as the light came in a beautiful diverging halo from the air-ship.

But only for a moment or so was the advance of the foe checked. Then they came on again.

Once more they paused, however, when they were almost within rifle range, and the cunning of the deserter from the Arctic exploring vessel, who seemed now to have become the leader of the United forces, was shown.

Cook issued an order for his men to spread out in a circle and then close in upon the disabled ship of the air.

It was the renegade seaman's purpose to have the attack made from every side of the vessel he sought to capture, simultaneously.

There was a few moments of silence on board the Queen Clipper. The men ranged along the barricaded rails watched the approaching foe and held their weapons ready.

Suddenly Frank issued the order:

"Fire, and make every bullet tell!"

A crash of musketry immediately ensued.

The crew of the aerial vessel discharged a volley of shots. There was an answering fire from the enemy, and a fierce pandemonium of battle sounds.

The volley from the Queen Clipper did considerable execution, while the bullets of the convicts and their savage allies were mostly turned aside by the barricade that sheltered Frank Reade's men.

But a furious charge ensued.

In a moment the on-rushing enemies of the aeronef were close upon the disabled ship.

Then Frank called half a dozen men to his side and distributed his wonderful compound—dynamite and nitro-glycerine torpedoes.

The time had come to use those terribly destructive engines of death.

The defenders of the air-ship began to hurl them among the enemy, now that the latter had come to close quarters.

The sounds of terrific explosions rent the air; detonation was blended with detonation; the yells of the enemy were drowned in the frightful noise.

And soon they beat a retreat out of range not only of the deadly torpedoes, but the rifles of the Queen Clipper's defenders as well.

A cheer went up from the crew of the air vessel at this destructive repulse of the enemy.

By this time the Arctic night had fallen in all its impenetrable gloom.

As soon as the enemy had passed beyond the area of the electric light's illumination they were swallowed up in the pervading darkness beyond.

Of the movements of the foe after they were out

men of the air-ship were compelled to remain ignorant.

Frank lost no time in getting to work on the central engine. He meant to get that machine in order and get under way even before he attempted to repair the stern propeller and the three wrecked masts.

It was evident that the enemy did not mean to risk another open attack. Nothing was seen or heard of them for a long time.

Meanwhile Frank called Captain Fred Archer into the central engine room, and said:

"We have a couple of sledges, such as are used by the Arctic natives, on deck. They were brought from the Endurance before she was blown up?" "Yes, the Esquimaux sledges are on board the Queen Clipper," replied the young army officer. "Very well. There are a number of casks of tar aboard, that also came from the lost Arctic vessel."

Captain Fred again assented, and Frank continued:

"Take Barney and Pomp and some other men with you to draw the sledges, loaded with the casks, and set them in a circle around the vessel, just where the electric lights illumination ends, and the darkness begins. Connect the tar casks with a wire attached to the battery, run it through the torpedo, placed against each cask, and we shall have a circle of fire in readiness to startle the enemy, if they come on again."

"Yes, and deal them death, too, if you will allow me to make a suggestion," replied Captain Fred.

"Certainly," assented Frank.

"Then I should say set a line of torpedoes against the electric wire, between the casks of tar."

"Excellent! Do so by all means."

"I will. But is there a sufficient supply of the torpedoes left for the purpose?"

"Yes."

"Then the circle of death shall be set," said Captain Fred in determination.

Leaving Frank, Engineer Sands and others at work on the central engine, the young officer proceeded to carry out the suggestion of the inventor.

The Eskimo sledges were placed on the ice, loaded with the tar and drawn away. Under Captain Fred's supervision the casks of tar were placed in a circle around the vessel at equal distances.

Then a load of torpedoes was drawn from the vessel and distributed along the electric wire running from the battery of "the Queen Clipper," which as first made to run to the casks containing the tar.

Barney and Pomp worked with a will to help accomplish this task looking to the discomfiture of the enemy.

They were delighted with the prospect of giving the rascals a deadly surprise, if they attempted to renew the attack.

Everything was complete, and the party who had set the deadly circle that now environed the Queen Clipper were returning to the vessel.

All at once darkness fell upon them.

The electric light on board the air-ship suddenly failed. The men of Captain Fred's party were surprised. They were confident that some accident had happened to the electric light.

And this proved to be the truth.

Several lanterns were shown on the aeronef, and guided by their light, Captain Fred's party made their way back to it.

Then they were informed that the electric appliance of the burner had suddenly failed to transmit a current, and examination revealed an injury to the machinery, which Frank Reade was even then working to repair.

CHAPTER LXXI.

RETURN OF THE ENEMY—AN ARCTIC EARTHQUAKE.

"Now that the electric light has failed, the enemy will take courage, and seek to surprise us by stealing upon us under cover of the darkness, I anticipate," said the doctor, as he stood near Frank Reade and Captain Fred Archer, while the young inventor was working to repair the conductor of the electric light.

"So I expect," assented Frank, and he added: "It is fortunate we have set the circle of fire and death which the enemy must pass to reach us."

"But how are we to know when they come upon the circle? We cannot see them in this darkness," said the doctor.

"In the gloom some of the enemy will be sure to stumble on the wire connecting the casks of tar, and against which the torpedoes have been placed. Here, on board the vessel, the end of the wire, before it enters the battery, is attached to a delicately balanced needle on a dial indicator. Even a slight pressure on the wire on any part of the circuit will indicate. A violent agitation, such as a the doctor's glass.

man would cause in stumbling over it, could not fail to be telegraphed to the dial. Then all we have to do is to turn on the electricity to the wire. There, presto! The electric current will explode the torpedoes, and fire the tar," explained Frank.

"Very good, I understand. But you must have someone to watch the indicator."

"And so I have. Blake is watching it."

"He will give a prompt alarm if the needle is disturbed?"

"Yes, and turn on the electricity."

"What's that?" exclaimed the doctor just then. Blake's voice was heard, and he shouted:

"There's something on the wire."

"Then on with the electric current," ordered Frank.

Blake turned a lever in the accumulating chamber. Frank and his companion gazed into the gloom beyond the Queen Clipper, and so did all the others on board the vessel, for the entire crew had heard Blake shout.

But an instant elapsed.

Then came a flash and a report afar on the ice.

Another, and another report ensued until the explosion of torpedoes seemed like a volley of canons.

And a dozen blazing fires burst out upon the midnight gloom as the tar-casks were ignited. Yells and fierce cries were heard, and the enemy was seen fleeing in consternation and dismay.

But many dark forms were left outstretched upon the ice, and the defenders of the air vessel knew that a large number of their foes had been slain by the explosion of the torpedoes.

The convicts and the Arctic savages did not pause in their retreat until they were lost to the sight of those on board the air-ship in the darkness beyond the light of the blazing tar-casks.

Meantime Frank Reade in about half an hour's time had the electric light blazing all right once more.

But the task of repairing the central engine was not yet completed. There was considerable more work to be done.

All night Frank and his assistants toiled at the task. During the night the convicts and their allies did not make another attack.

When morning dawned nothing was to be seen of the enemy, and the inventor said:

"I think we shall not be troubled further by the foe."

"I am afraid you are wrong," replied Captain Richard Archer, the commander of the lost Arctic vessel.

"Why so?" Frank inquired. "Does it not seem reasonable to suppose the severe loss the enemy has met with may deter them from again making an attack?"

"Such would be my own conviction were it not for the fact that I know Cook, the deserter, is yet unharmed and with the enemy," replied the Arctic explorer.

"Then you think the villainous seaman may incite his comrades to further violence?"

"I do, I am almost sure of it. Cook is one of the shrewdest men I have ever met in his station in life. He is a rude orator of great eloquence, and vindictive and determined. He will never abandon the attempt to capture us. While we remain here I am confident that now he has only gone for reinforcements, and that we shall see more of him and his followers," replied Captain Richard.

He spoke with confidence, as if he had all faith in his conviction.

"Well," replied Frank, "all we can do is to be as rapid as possible in making the repairs, and try to get afloat in the air again before the enemy returns."

The other assented, and just then there was no further conversation that need be recorded.

Toward noon Frank announced that in a couple of hours more he would have the central engine repaired.

But about one o'clock Dr. Vaneyke, who was inspecting the surroundings and keeping a lookout for the return of the enemy, announced:

"I discover a dark, moving object to the southward."

"That is the direction in which the enemy retreated," said Captain Fred Archer.

"Yes," assented the doctor, and he continued to watch the dark moving object which he had sighted. Presently it developed into a mass of moving forms. The doctor did not have to continue his inspection much longer before he was sure of what he saw.

Putting aside the glass, he shouted to Frank, who at that moment appeared at the door of the central cabin:

"The enemy is returning, and now they are several hundred strong! The wild Arctic tribes have been drawn upon for reinforcements by the convicts!"

Frank came across the deck and looked through

He saw at once that his old friend had stated the fact.

"How soon can we get under way?" asked the doctor.

"In a few moments if all goes well."

"Then we may be in the air before the enemy arrives."

"Yes."

Frank hastened back to the central cabin.

There Sands, Blake, Hall and Barney were now at work.

"The enemy is in sight again. They are returning with strong reinforcements," announced Frank, as he entered the cabin.

Then he set to work with the others.

There was only one driving-bar and a single set of cogs to be fixed in place yet.

When that was done the suspensory engine could be started.

"We have not an instant to lose, men! Hasten! Hasten!" cried Frank.

The bar was placed in position, and five pairs of willing hands were swiftly employed in fastening the dozen screws which were required to secure it. Many hands make swift work, and the driving-bar was screwed to its place in a few moments.

The cogs were properly adjusted.

The toilers uttered a glad shout then, and Frank said:

"Our task on this engine is completed. Now to test it. I think we shall find it now works properly."

The young inventor depressed the main lever, and so turned a current of electricity on to the engine from the great accumulators in the battery-room below deck.

At once the machinery was set in motion.

But at that moment the Queen Clipper suddenly heaved, as though giant hands had seized upon the vessel and were seeking to overturn it.

There came a strange, rumbling sound.

Then a report, like the booming of cannon, and as Frank turned to the cabin door only a cloud of steam met his sight.

And the air ship continued to heave and tremble.

"What is it? What can have occurred? Merciful Heaven! is the Queen Clipper doomed after all?" cried Sands.

"There is awful danger. An Arctic earthquake is in progress. The ice is heaving all around us, and the sea is sending up torrents of steam through the opening," replied the doctor, who comprehended the phenomenon.

CHAPTER LXXII.

CONCLUSION.

If it had not been for the dense clouds of steam that issued from the cracks in the ice caused by the earthquake, which was the result of submarine volcanic action, the crew of the Queen Clipper might have beheld a wonderful and thrilling scene.

The ice was upheaved and sundered in cracks in every direction. It was the cracking of the thick ice that caused the crashing detonations that sounded like the reports of a cannonade.

Water spouted here and there among the steam clouds, and the commotion of under-sea origin went on for some moments.

The Queen Clipper was in awful danger of being engulfed; the ice upon which the ship of the air rested might at any moment open and engulf her. Frank comprehended this.

It was with great joy that he saw the engine in the central cabin work all right as he depressed the levers.

An instant and the welcome sound of the revolving helices of the suspensory series, to which the central engine had imparted motion, was heard, and then a shout such as had not been heard on board the Queen Clipper in a long time went up from every throat.

The vessel began to rise. In a moment or so more she was soaring twenty feet above the ice.

Just then a great crash sounded from below.

The ice had parted—almost where the Queen Clipper had rested on it—great masses of ice were hurled skyward and a torrent of steam and water shot upward.

If the Queen Clipper had remained on the ice for only a few moments longer she would have been destroyed there.

But now she soared beyond the reach of the Arctic earthquake's peril and the attacks of her human foes.

Despite the damaged stern propeller and the three wrecked suspensory masts, the air-ship made good progress southward.

A breeze dispelled the clouds of vapor that hung over the scene of the earthquake, and through his glass Frank took a look at it.

The surface everywhere was rent and fissured. The ice was heaped about in chaotic confusion.

And the young inventor looked in vain for the army of his enemies.

What their fate was he never knew positively, but he presumed, of course, that they had been engulfed by the earthquake. Probably the ice had opened under their feet and they had gone to their death in the icy sea.

It was a terrible fate, and Frank fervently thanked the all-wise Providence for the deliverance of himself and his comrades from a like doom.

The Queen Clipper was guided southward over the continent of North America. A landing was made on the Pacific coast, north of Alaska, and there the stern propeller and the three suspensory masts were repaired.

The voyage was then continued southward along the coast. But a few hours later, as night came on, a gale set in from the east.

At first Frank did not anticipate anything serious, and the vessel continued to sail on after the darkness fell.

But the gale increased in violence, until in an hour's time it had become the most terrible wind storm the Queen Clipper had ever encountered.

It was indeed a cyclone, a phenomenal storm, the records of which were a long list of losses at sea and devastation by land.

In that storm many precious lives were lost, and millions of dollars' worth of property went to the bottom of the ocean.

The Queen Clipper was carried eastward before the gale with frightful velocity.

It would have been suicidal to have attempted to make a landing then.

All that could be done was to run before the gale.

Frank made a calculation toward midnight, which, though of course not absolutely correct, was approximately so, and sufficed to give him the positive assurance that the air-vessel had been blown far out to sea.

After midnight the gale began to subside.

But during the storm five of the suspensory helices had been carried away and the perpendicular and horizontal equalization was lost. The Queen Clipper hung lop-sided in the air.

Rain began to fall in torrents as the fury of the wind abated. The electric light was turned on, but the wind-driven sheets of water seemed to blur the white light of the electric fluid, and the lookout's eyes were blinded.

It was near the hour of dawn, and all hands were watching and waiting for the first appearance of day most anxiously, when a terrible calamity occurred.

Suddenly, without a warning, there came a terrible crash. Every one was thrown from their feet.

The Queen Clipper began to settle down.

The suspensory engine stopped, and in a moment it was known that the bow of the vessel was shattered.

Suddenly a whirlwind caught the disabled vessel and whirled it round and dashed it broadside against some object that offered firm resistance.

Shouts of dismay and despair went up from the crew. The shattered vessel went down, down through the gloom, and with a final plunge struck in water.

"We are in the Pacific Ocean, but near some island with rocky ramparts against which the wind dashed us!" said the doctor, as he and Frank clung to the machinery in the central cabin.

Just then the vessel parted amidships, and the waves swept the sunken portions of the Queen Clipper in different directions.

"The good ship is doomed," said Frank in tones of deepest regret. "And we are doomed, too, unless we can make the land."

"Yes. But see! the light of day is appearing in the east. We shall soon be able to learn more of our situation if our portion of the wreck only keeps afloat a little longer," replied the doctor.

The part of the wrecked air-ship on which the young inventor, the doctor and a part of the crew were continued to float.

The rain subsided. The wind almost entirely fell. And finally broad daylight disclosed the scene to the victims of the storm and wreck.

They saw an island near by with lofty, rocky walls rising mountain high from the sea, and they knew the Queen Clipper was wrecked against it.

The lookout had failed to discover the island in time to prevent the disaster.

Both sections of the Queen Clipper were still afloat when day dawned, and Frank shouted to his men to get out the rubber boats. But then it was almost immediately discovered that those boats had been lost in the storm.

Efforts were then made to propel the two sec-

tions of the wreck in the direction of the ~~islands~~. But the wind was adverse, and the wreck was carried far away from the rocky land with which the Queen Clipper had come in collision.

Finally the island was out of sight.

The situation of the men clinging to the wrecked vessel was then appalling. There they were, in mid ocean, without a boat, and the two sections of the air-ship now showed that they would soon go to pieces, for they had been most seriously damaged.

It was an awful time.

The men of the wrecked ship prayed for deliverance and divine mercy, and eager eyes scanned the sea in every direction in search of a sail.

The hours wore on. The section of the vessel upon which Frank was parted again. The young inventor was hurled into the sea; but just at the moment of despair the thrilling shout of "A sail!" rang out from the other section of the wreck. Frank was drawn on board the floating wreck, and a moment later a gallant steamer was seen bearing down upon the wreck.

Frank and his friends were disengaged.

We need not dwell long on what ensued. All hands belonging to the air-ship were taken on board the steamer, and as she steamed away Frank Reade saw first one and then the other section of the noble Queen Clipper go to pieces and sink to rise no more. Frank turned sadly from the scene; but he thought he had good cause to be thankful that he and his men did not share the fate of his great invention.

The steamer was bound for San Francisco, and Frank and his comrades were in due time safely landed at that port. The Archer brothers remained for a time in the metropolis of the Pacific coast, but Frank and his own crew hastened by rail home to Readestown, while the rescued crew of the Arctic ship sought their several homes.

Of course a warm welcome awaited Frank and his crew in Readestown, and on the day of their arrival in their native town everybody turned out to do them honor.

We will leave them safe among friends and kindred, for we feel that under such pleasant circumstances the reader will be willing to say "Good-bye," at least for a time.

[THE END.]

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